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MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE

MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE

By

RICCARDO STEPHENS

WITH TWENTY-SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
W. G. BURN MURDOCH

Cover Design by CHARLES ROBINSON

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	On Duty	11
II.	On the Spirit of the Age	18
III.	On the Position of Woman	25
IV.	On the Duties of the Upper Classes	30
V.	On the Education of the Masses	38
VI.	The Beauty of Simplicity	45
VII.	On Art in Relation to Life	53
VIII.	Peace or War?	61
IX.	More on Simplicity	68
X.	On Governesses	79
XI.	On Charity	88
XII.	On Love and Matrimony	95
XIII.	On Pride of Birth	108
XIV.	On Manners	114
XV.	A Secret	123
XVI.	A Revelation	131
XVII.	The Cheiromantist	139
XVIII.	The Biter Bit	150
XIX.	The New Crusade	155
XX.	Twellerby	161
XXI.	Confessions	170

PAGE

XXII. SCIENCE 181

XXIII. PAST AND PRESENT 191

XXIV. FOR PITY'S SAKE 199

XXV. A CHAPTER OF REVELATIONS . . . 205

XXVI. FOR THE BENEFIT OF POSTERITY . . . 212

XXVII. INTUITION 218

XXVIII. THE COLONEL 227

XXIX. THE COLONEL PAYS HIS RESPECTS . . . 237

XXX. ON OYSTERS AND GOOD MANNERS . . . 243

XXXI. THE BODY SNATCHERS 253

XXXII. ON MARRIAGE 260

XXXIII. AN ART PATRONESS 270

XXXIV. THE APOTHEOSIS OF MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE . 280

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"I rise"	11
"'Once danced at a hydropathic with a man who was being looked for everywhere for forgery'"	15
"Waiting figure by the door"	23
"The lady caller was Miss Bell Spanker herself, with her usual short skirt, single eyeglass, and blank stare"	28
"The 'young person' was allowed to drift into obscurity"	36
"She thought, with the education she had, it was her duty to try for higher employment"	40
"A sick woman had confessed, stammering hoarsely at my ear, that she had no food for her dying child"	46
"'They've the queerest ideas, I've heard. I suppose they pick them up in the Paris studios'"	49
"'I love Art. . . . When I sat for my portrait we talked of nothing else'"	55
"In conversation on serious topics"	60
"Her hand was quicker than mine"	75
"In the Garden of Eden"	78
"'I have had eight altogether'"	80
Fencing	115
Boxing	115
Society bows	119
"I found the note upon my breakfast table"	125
"Presumably higher rung of the social ladder"	162

PAGE

"Prepared the little table" 165

"'Two lumps?'" 174

"'Music,' said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, 'is divine'" . . . 179

"A musical evening" 183

"'Was it cold?'" 187

"She had called, she said, for a subscription" 222

"I found myself in a very comfortable chair" 231

"'That little hussy, Dorothy Summers'" 261

Apotheosis 289

MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE

I.

On Duty

WAS allowed to take tea *tête-à-tête* with my friend Mrs. De la Rue Smythe a short time ago, and to hear her comments upon current topics.

"After a chat with you," I told her, helping myself to sugar, "I feel melancholy for the rest of the day."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked interested and politely concerned.

"Am I so depressing?"

"It is my unselfish nature," I explained, "and my stupidity."

"Oh, don't say *that*, Dr. Tregenna! I know people far worse than you?"

"More unselfish!" I asked.

"More stupid."

"You don't say so!" I exclaimed, and sat thinking over this astonishing revelation, while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, nodding her head at me with a sweet smile of encouragement, waited for further confidences. They did not come, for I had forgotten what I had said, and was idly wondering what difference it would make to posterity if women thought as much of Hygiene as they do of Fashion!

Presently Mrs. De la Rue Smythe lost patience, which, however, brought no frown upon her face. Frowns are luxuries which Mrs. Smythe cannot allow herself. As I have remarked elsewhere, they tend to destroy symmetry, and can only be indulged in by those to whom symmetry has been denied. She showed her feeling by a sharp tap of the crested spoon against her cup.

The De la Rue Smythes' crest is (so far as I can describe it, for I am no herald) a radiant sun *or* upon a field *azure*, with the motto—I rise. They started it and their carriage together. It is

astonishing how many of us have the modesty to keep our noble ancestors in the background until we can, so to speak, support them well. I myself —but that might not interest you. It is well known, however, that cadets from our best families have sometimes of late taken to literature, and even accept payment, when it is offered, for their work. But this may be egotistical, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is waiting all the time.

"Come!" she said at last. "You're the most absent-minded, if not the stupidest, man I know. How do I bore you?"

I said nothing, but simply looked my reproaches. She knew as well as I did that I had not said or meant any such thing.

"If only," I told her, "I could reproduce our chats—yours, that is, of course—so that a wider audience might enjoy them!"

"By-the-by," she said, leaning forward and speaking more energetically than usual, "I heard yesterday that you were suspected of having written a novel."

"Do you think I could?" I asked, with as hurt an expression as I could call up. I meant on account of my profession and prospects, but I grieve to say that she took it differently.

"No," she said with emphasis, "I don't, and I told them so. I said that you were a good,

hard-working, steady fellow, and I *hoped* that you would make a comfortable income at your profession some day, *but*——" There was a world of kindly sincerity in the *but*, and I tried to look as if I was grateful. I wonder whether I succeeded! I fear not, for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe hastened to qualify her statement.

"Of course, one never knows," she went on. "A cousin of mine once danced at a hydropathic with a man who was being looked for everywhere for forgery. She said he had the *nicest* way with him, though not at all clever to look at."

"Am I to understand," I demanded, "that my ways are nice? or that I am a forger? or that I am not at all clever to look at?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe leaned back in her chair and eyed me severely.

"Your ways are not at all nice sometimes. The less said about them the better."

"Let us say nothing, then," I rejoined, and picked up my hat, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was not so easily evaded.

"I always declared," she said, "that you really knew how to behave, even though——" and she stopped again.

"Well!" I said, standing before her. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Not *yet!*" but she spoke so ominously that I

sat down again, and humbly asked what it was that she wanted to know.

"Why are you so sad after leaving me?"

"Is it not enough——" I began, and was hoping

"DANCED AT A HYDROPATHIC WITH A MAN WHO WAS BEING LOOKED FOR EVERYWHERE FOR FORGERY."

to say something rather pretty, but she raised her hand warningly.

"No, not that," she told me with a weary air. "If you only knew how tired one gets." So I had to take another line.

"I can't help thinking," I said, "that the ideas I get from you, when we are together chatting

like this, are such as would please a great many people," and I stick to that. Some people are pleased oddly.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's expression became chastened, and reflective almost to pathos. She assumed an air of melancholy, and gave a little sigh.

"One can't help having ideas," she said.

"Some can," I assured her, "and then they like to collar other people's. Now, I never have any. But I might, perhaps, help to express yours."

"If one could only do good!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and I applauded her aspiration.

"What do you think we could discuss usefully?" she asked. She was sitting up very straight now, and looked much interested. Some women are so philanthropic.

"A host of things," I told her. "I must think the matter over, and bring you some suggestions."

"I shall be delighted at any time," she said warmly, "so long as it does not interfere with my other duties."

"It will only add to your usefulness," I assured her.

"The Spirit of the Age——" she went on.

"Good!" I cried enthusiastically, and made a note of it.

"——and the Position of Woman——"

"Go on!" I told her, jotting that down too; but at this moment a caller was announced, the conversation turned to other things, and presently I came away.

That night, however, I completed a list of subjects to lay before Mrs. De la Rue Smythe at our next meeting for her consideration and criticism. They were:—

I. The Spirit of the Age.
II. The Position of Woman.
III. The Duties of the Upper Classes.
IV. The Education of the Masses.
V. The Beauty of Simplicity.
VI. The Place of Art in Life.

II.

On the Spirit of the Age

WHETHER or not Mrs. De la Rue Smythe agrees with those eminent persons who believe their intellectual efforts to be affected by their costume I do not know. I found her in modified mourning, and I inquired respectfully whether it aided Thought, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shook her head.

"The dear Duke!" she said. "I was only advised of his death this morning."

"I also!" I sighed.

It is true that the daily paper was my channel of "advice," but as hers no doubt had been the same, that was all right.

"Were you nearly related?" I asked, and was quite surprised to be told, "No."

"In fact," said Mrs. De la Rue Symthe heroically, "I do not know that he is related to our family at all, but I saw a great deal of him last year at Monte Carlo."

I was sorry to hear this, for I had been "advised" that the highly respected and lately deceased peer was a Rip, and had spent all his time, and a great deal of his money, at *rouge et noir*, but I was much concerned at her loss, and asked whether she would prefer to postpone our chat. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe roused herself, however, and said that these things must not be allowed to interfere with one's daily duties.

"In half an hour," she said, "Madame Chiffon has engaged to be here. Until then I have arranged to be quite free for you."

"Half an hour is short measure!" I said. "Couldn't Madame Chiffon call another day? If it is a matter of a costume, surely it may wait."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe sighed wearily.

"You know," she said, "how little I care for these things from the ordinary woman's point of view. What I ask is, 'Can they help?'"

"Help what?"

"To increase one's usefulness. I say to myself, 'Will it increase my influence for good?' That is my question about everything, Dr. Tregenna, and with regard to dress, the answer is 'Yes.' So I make time for seeing people who attend to such matters."

"You were always self-denying," I said with admiration; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I know,

recognized the justice of my assertion, though she raised a well-shaped hand in modest denial.

"In these days," she said earnestly, "when selfishness is rampant, one must set a good example. At such times even a timid woman must not be afraid to let the world know that she has the courage of her opinions!"

"When she has opinions, and when they are courageous," I suggested, "but come, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, let me, like the orthodox interviewer, plunge at once *in medias res.* What about the Spirit of the Age?"

"I was reading——" she began, but I stopped her.

"Pardon me," I said gently but firmly. "I trust you won't misunderstand me when I say that I don't want to know what you've read. Others can read it too. I want to hear what you have thought and felt, what you have seen."

"I have seen Anarchy lately," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe irrelevantly and sharply. "What do you think? My new cook, only here a month, has given me warning!"

I threw up my hands.

"Why on earth——?" I asked amazedly.

"'Or in heaven, indeed,' I know you're going to say," added Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. "I'm sure she couldn't have a better place——" but there she

stopped, feeling, I think, that she was getting a trifle mixed.

"Tell me the reason," I begged her, really concerned, for I knew perfectly well, from my own experience, that the cook was an artist.

"Such a trifle!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe replied disdainfully. "Really, these lower classes have no sense of the ludicrous! It's all because I call her Muir!"

"But why does she object if that's her name? I'm sure it's a very good one!"

"Of course it is, and so I told her, though it doesn't happen to be hers."

"But——" I began, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe waved me impatiently into silence.

"I like the name," she said. "Isn't that enough? My last three cooks have been called Muir, and my parlour-maid is always Stewart. I told her so, but these women have no consideration."

"What objection did she make?" I asked.

"Oh, she was perfectly absurd. Said she was called Mary Menzies, and that would do for her until she got married. These women are always thinking of marriage."

"Shameful!" I said. "It must be due to their horribly low instincts."

"Quite so!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe nodded approvingly. "And yet, see how much one does

for them. There is scarcely a charity that Mr. De la Rue Smythe does not subscribe to (if I approve of the object, of course), and I give a servants' ball every year."

"You are too good to them," I suggested. "Is it the fault of over-education, do you think?"

This fairly roused Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. She bent forward with the same impressive look which has dominated so many drawing-room meetings, and I was just settling down comfortably in my easy-chair, under the conviction that I was going to have a most instructive chat, when the door opened.

"Madame Chiffon!"

It was "Stewart" who spoke, and Madame, evidently a privileged person, glided in close behind her, and stood waiting at the far end of the room.

"What a pity!" sighed Mrs. De la Rue Smythe; "I never knew her to be early before."

"It is a pity," I agreed, "but we won't keep her waiting very long."

"Waiting!"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's face as she gasped that one word, wore an expression of horror which I could not comprehend.

"My dear Doctor, you don't understand. It's Madame Chiffon!"

"Yes, I know. Your dressmaker, isn't she?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe stirred a little, and glanced uneasily toward the silent, waiting figure by the door.

"Well," she said, "I think it's a long time since

"WAITING FIGURE BY THE DOOR."

she has called herself dressmaker. She's an Artiste in Modes, don't you know."

"The deuce she is!" I muttered, vaguely wondering what difference that made, and what I was expected to do.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me!

"It's very silly, of course," she said in a hurried undertone, rising as she spoke, "but she is not *accustomed* to be kept waiting, don't you know! In fact, it is not often that one can get her to come at all. You don't mind, do you now?"

I minded a good deal, but I didn't say so. All I said was, "But what about the Spirit of the Age?"

"Its characteristic is Impatience," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe hurriedly. "The Spirit of the Age must wait," and before the door had closed behind me, she was making elaborate apologies to the great artiste for having kept her waiting so long.

III.

On the Position of Woman

"I HOPE," I said ironically, "that there is no chance of my disturbing any appointment with Madame Chiffon to-day?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, leaning back in a very easy chair (which she says is to aid reflection) surveyed me calmly through half-closed eyes, and said, "No." (I cannot claim ever to have noticed any good effect produced on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe by any speech of mine. Mild amusement suggests itself sometimes, but I am not sure even of that. I suppose a constant concern about her duties protects her, though I have heard her assert, with nonchalance, her dread of sarcasm.)

"Then," I suggested, "suppose we talk further of the Spirit of the Age. You will remember, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, that you were going to give me your views on that, when you were interrupted for something more important.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smiled serenely, and said "Yes," but announced that she did not intend to discuss that matter more for the present.

"The fact is," she told me, "the position of woman is so much the product of the spirit of the age, that I feel we can go on to that and still fulfil our duty."

"Let us do that or die!" I said fervently, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, eyeing me severely, said, "Certainly," she "hoped so."

"Woman," she went on, "is gradually forcing her way to the front, and taking up that position to which she is entitled. It is shown everywhere, both in work and recreation. Look at cycling, for instance."

"The position there is *not* the same," I insisted hastily. "You surely do not advocate sitting astr——"; but she continued riding me down, as it were, remorselessly.

"It is true," she said, with a slight shrug, "that I find men pay more attention to a woman riding by, than to one of themselves"—("I believe you," I interjected respectfully)—"but still in all these things woman has gradually asserted her right to go her own way, and holds her own."

"I met a lady this morning," I said, "biking. She certainly went her own way, a funny one, but she couldn't hold her own bike."

"You helped her, of course," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"How could I?" I expostulated. "If a girl's

bicycle runs off with her, you can't pursue and catch hold of the bridle, or snatch her off and swing her across your own saddlebow, just as her maddened steed goes headlong over the precipice. One could do that in the old days,—at least some could apparently,—but not now."

"What did you do, then?" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe demanded sternly.

"Oh, I just fled!" I felt myself quailing under Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's contemptuous gaze, but I determined to brazen it out.

"You see," I explained, "if I had stayed where I was, she would have tumbled over me—I mean my bicycle—and that would have been hard on her. Besides, she had a groom."

"A groom!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's scorn was superb, and I cowered before her.

"Since when," she asked, after an awful silence, "since when, may I ask, has it been the habit of gentlemen to leave ladies, when in difficulty, to their grooms?"

I lifted my hands in an appeal for mercy.

"It must surely depend upon the lady," I pleaded. "This was Miss Bell Spanker, known to her male friends, I believe, as 'Billy.' She told me the other night when I met her, that she thought herself able to take care of herself anywhere and at any time, and that she didn't believe in other

fellows interfering. Besides, 'woman has gradually asserted her right to go her own way, and holds her own.'"

Just then a lady caller was shown up. I looked reproachfully at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. But I admit that in my inmost heart I was well pleased. The intense air of conviction with which I had uttered my last quotation had, I fear, failed to convince Mrs. De la Rue Smythe of my *bona fides*.

MISS BELL SPANKER.

The lady caller was Miss Bell Spanker herself, with her usual short skirt, single eyeglass, and blank stare.

"Nearly spilt you this mornin'," she remarked with a nod. "Comin' out?" This last was to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who had risen, thereby making her own short skirt obvious.

I left, wishing them a pleasant ride and a safe

return. They were going to a bicycle-tea, and later I saw them and many other male and female enthusiasts, appropriately attired, criticising one another's "bikes" at their hostess's door.

My consolation is, that soon it will be orthodox to pay afternoon calls in knickerbockers and a white flannel shirt.

IV.

On the Duties of the Upper Classes

WHEN I called upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe again I found her in a moralizing mood. It presently appeared that she had met her butcher's daughter upon a bicycle.

"As good as my own!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me.

"Excellent!" I said. "Is it not delightful to think of this young girl being able to get from the counter to the country, from pork to pleasure, and from beef to buttercups?"

"Mutton to madness!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe added sharply. "Really, I'm surprised at you, Dr. Tregenna."

"I am constantly surprised at myself," I told her, "but I don't see anything startling just now."

"Can't you see," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe asked, "that this silly girl is simply aping her betters?"

"If," I protested feebly, "the poor girl imitates you, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I cannot blame her. Imitation, you know, is the sincerest flattery."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shrugged her shoulders in despair.

"I don't think it is any use trying to make you understand. What makes you so stupid nowadays?"

I thought carefully. "Prosperity, I suppose," I said at last. "I had a fee this week, and hope to get another one soon, if I 'm orthodox and good."

"Perhaps that's why it is that you say nothing original," she went on. "If you open your mouth at all now, it is to let me hear some stale proverb. If you were not so stupid you would see that it is your duty to look at the idiocies of the People from a higher point of view."

"Really?" I said, much impressed. "Now we are reaching our subject—the Duties of the Upper Classes. Let me try to imagine myself, just for a quarter of an hour, indisputably Upper. Where do the Upper Classes begin?"

"Professional men of good income, family, and education——" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe began, with her eye upon a photograph of De la Rue Smythe in his robes, but I stopped her.

"I haven't any income worth mentioning," I said, "and it's just as easy to imagine anything else as that. Now a Duke, I suppose, is beyond doubt, isn't he?"

"Why, of course!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked shocked at my flippancy.

"When I met the poor Duke at Monte Carlo ——" she began, but I remorselessly cut her short.

"It doesn't make any difference how a Duke behaves, does it?" I asked her.

"We must not judge them," she sighed; "wealth and position have special temptations."

"They escape those of poverty, anyway," I suggested. "But for a quarter of an hour I'll risk being a Duke, temptations and all. I am the Duke of Doodleshire, and you are—Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. What are our duties?"

"Humility," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe pensively, "must come before all."

"Combined, of course," I suggested, "with a proper pride?"

"Oh, certainly; but we must never forget what we owe to those around us."

"I wish I could," I said heartily; but on seeing her look of surprise I apologized, and explained that I had forgotten my riches. "Pride and Humility," I said, counting on my fingers. "Go on, please!"

"Condescension and Consideration for your Inferiors."

"How," I asked timidly, "does our humility condescend to recognize its inferiors?"

"By their inferiority," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and hurried on.

"Boldness in upholding the Rights and Privileges of our Order."

"House of Lords!" I cried enthusiastically, and sat erect that the Ducal coronet might not fall off.

"At the same time," she proceeded, with another glance toward the portrait of her spouse, "you must remember the necessity for fresh blood."

"Barmaids and ballet-dancers?" I suggested, and thought I should have withered on the spot, such was the blighting influence of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's eye. She put up her glasses, which she uses on such occasions only, and surveyed me in stony silence for a full half-minute. "Don't, *please*," she said at last—and on the whole I 'm not likely to, if I know it, but exactly where I erred I can't imagine.

I was obviously crushed, and presently, relenting, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on: "I was referring, Dr. Tregenna," she said, "to the Aristocracy of Intellect. A Peer is not of necessity a genius, ("Further startling disclosures!" I murmured), though blood must tell." "Tell what?" I asked, but got no reply. "I would not have rank degraded, a thing for Tom, Dick, and Harry," she continued severely, "but (she glanced at De la Rue Smythe again) among scientists there are many

who would be an ornament to *any* order, Dr. Tregenna."

"It shall be seen to," I promised graciously. "The learned professions, medicine especially, have been neglected, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, but all that shall be amended," and I waved her on to the next point.

"Simplicity of living," she went on, "should be encouraged by example. Oh, Dr. Tregenna, if only these people knew the charm of the Simpler Life! As I said to the poor Duke——"

"Requiescat," I said hastily, almost dropping my cup, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe lost her train of thought.

"Really, you know, you sometimes get on my nerves. Where was I?"

"You were on the point of going into the details of a simpler life," I reminded her. "We are sad dogs for extravagance, I admit," and I sighed, trying to feel as though I knew what it was to squander thousands.

"Yes," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe insisted impressively. "Simplicity in *everything*, Dr. Tregenna. I try to carry that idea through life; it should be seen in dress, manner, and all household arrangements. I had to part with a very good governess only last winter, simply because of my principles. Perhaps you remember her?"

I had seen her.

"Had she none?" I asked, shocked at this wolf in sheep's clothing, whom I recollected having seen in the nursery.

"She was a young person with the highest recommendations," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe allowed generously, "but she dressed above her station, Dr. Tregenna. I pointed out to her that she attracted observation, but she seemed quite careless."

I groaned my disapproval.

"She looked quite a lady," I said incautiously.

"*Really*, do you think so?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said this a little stiffly, and then added, "Well, she couldn't deceive me!" after which the "young person" was allowed to drift into obscurity, while we again turned our attention to the upper classes and their responsibilities.

"A proper self-respect, as you say, Dr. Tregenna, is a duty. One cannot help feeling that Providence knows best. If it has been pleased to place us above others, who are we, to complain?"

"Who, indeed?" I gasped.

"And if we should rise higher (though, remember, a well-bred person is *anyone's* equal), however little we may care for these things, Dr. Tregenna, we must accept our position. There is a pride that apes humility."

"How very subtle!" I said, "and yet how true! 'A pride that apes humility.' I shall remember that, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe."

The perfumed air of the room, heavy with the

"THE 'YOUNG PERSON' WAS ALLOWED TO DRIFT INTO OBSCURITY."

scent of flowers, and the subdued hiss of the water in the silver tea-kettle—for I had asked to be allowed another cup—tended to dreamy revelations, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe yielded to the influence of her surroundings.

"Yes!" she told me, leaning back in her chair, with an absent-minded glance at a new bracelet; "the Simpler Life is my dream; like most dreams, I fear, never to be realized."

I was deeply affected—Fate is so remorseless in crushing our noblest aspirations. I begged for details.

"A few books," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe confessed, "the simplest food—fruit, for example (I love grapes and pineapples)—a little cottage where one could be in touch with Nature—I feel that I should want nothing more."

"You remind me very much of Thoreau," I told her. "He had the same simple tastes, the same longing for communion with Nature."

"Really! Now I remember. He wrote of all these things, didn't he?"

"Far worse!" I told her. "He yielded to temptation, and did them. You will never do that, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe."

"Never!" she said gravely. "We all have our selfish impulses, but some of us know how to resist them. I cannot imagine myself forsaking domestic and social duties to gratify any such desire."

"Nor can I," I admitted, and said good-bye with that profound respect which one must always feel for the Slave to Duty.

V.

On the Education of the Masses

AFTER our little chat upon the Duties of the Upper Classes, I lost my instructress for a fortnight. She was visiting friends in Kent, and came back full of enthusiasm for a country life.

"Such a sweet village! With hops and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and trains every hour or so, so that one could run into town for the theatre, or shopping, or anything like that!"

"That doesn't sound quite like ideal country," I suggested.

"Not perhaps quite ideal," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe admitted; "but one never gets *that*, does one?" and she sighed with the air of a woman who knew only too well that life is a compromise.

"Nice unsophisticated people?" I queried; and she sighed again.

"There's a great change, Dr. Tregenna. I was down there—well, er, ah—some *years* ago, and then their manners were *charming*. It was enough that one was staying at the Hall. Every man touched

his hat to you, and every woman dropped a curtsey as you went through the village. Now——" and I felt that no further explanation from Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was necessary, to prove that now the village had degenerated.

"They won't do as they're told any more," she added; and I could only sigh for this Paradise into which the serpent had entered.

"For example?" I said, when I had cheered up a little.

"Well, Dr. Tregenna, I could give you *scores* of examples. One will do, though. My friend, who is kindness itself, offered to take a girl into her house as scullery-maid. She told me that she knew the parents, and was willing to let the girl be taught her work by the cook, which was very kind, for it's a *horrid* trouble, you know, teaching a servant. And what *do* you think?"

"I can't say," I sighed. "In these days one doesn't know what to think."

"She refused!"

"Never!" I cried, aghast at such depravity.

"She did! And when my friend, instead of getting into a temper as some people would, asked her quite nicely for her reason, what do you think she said?"

Again I could only shake my head. The world seemed upside down!

"She said that she thought, with the education she had, it was her duty to try for higher employment! There's sophistry for you!"

"Where?" I asked feebly. I don't blame myself, even now, for not seeing it. I never was quick at seeing things, and just then everything was in a whirl.

"IT WAS HER DUTY TO TRY FOR HIGHER EMPLOYMENT."

"How dense you are! Can't you see the sharpness of the minx? Making duty a cloak for the indulgence of her wicked pride?"

"Oh, I see," I said. "But mayn't she have deceived herself? Some people do, I believe."

"Don't talk such utter nonsense! Don't tell me that it's possible to deceive oneself like that. The Path of Duty is always plain to a woman who doesn't wilfully shut her eyes to it, Dr. Tregenna."

"Well," I said humbly, "you know best, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, but——"

"But what?" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's eye was fixed upon me in cold watchfulness. Why do I begin sentences before being quite sure that I want to finish them?

"But—I think it's time for me to be going," I said feebly, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's eye fully expressed the contempt she felt for such a feeble evasion.

"We haven't *begun* to talk yet," she said. "But what?"

"But!" I repeated timidly, and then plunged at it.

"But don't you think she may have known best?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe eyed me for a while in silence and with ineffable scorn. Then she began to *explain.* Have you ever seen any very dignified person "come down" and laboriously *explain*, or try to *explain*, something to a very small and stupid child? It was in that way that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe now proceeded to *explain* to me, the points being checked off the fingers of one charming hand by the forefinger of the other.

"You don't understand," she said patiently. "Let me *explain.* Here is a girl of the humblest parentage, and with no prospects. Here is a

woman of refinement, who offers her training, a good home, the most careful supervision (my friend is a *perfect* disciplinarian), and the prospects of, why, well *anything*, if she shows herself fit for it. What more could any self-respecting girl wish for?"

"Liberty!" I muttered under my breath, but when I was asked what I had said I did not repeat it.

"There's something wrong!" I allowed. "But no doubt you can make it plain to me. This young person should have let your friend decide for her, because——?"

"She was better able to judge," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe triumphantly.

"Because——" I went on.

"She was a woman of education. The girl was not half educated."

"Poor thing!" I said compassionately; "and your friend meant to go on with her education. How good of her!"

"She would have been taught her duty," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with some little asperity.

"Let us hope that she may yet learn it," I replied fervently. "And these mistakes, you say, are the result of ignorance?"

"Ignorance and over-education," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with decision.

"The first in the girl, the second in your friend's case?"

"How could my friend be over-educated?" demanded Mrs. De la Rue Smythe wrathfully.

"How could the girl be over-educated?" I retorted, trembling at my own audacity and wooden-headedness—and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was obliged to explain once more. The patience of that woman is simply angelic. "In my friend's sphere of action," she went on, "over-education is impossible, except when it threatens the physique. The wider her education, I assure you, the wider will her views be, the broader her sympathies. You have no *idea* of the varied knowledge necessary for the proper playing in society of even a poor little part like mine."

"You make it quite clear," I said eagerly. (I was sure I was on the right track this time.) "You mean that if only this girl, whom we take as an example, had the same opportunities and education——"

"She would be *ruined*," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

This result of increased knowledge was so startling that I sat silent and appalled

"As a scullery-maid she would be useless," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on.

"Perhaps," I hazarded, "she might be fit for some other equally honourable position?"

"And where," demanded Mrs. De la Rue Smythe,

"would my friend be, if other girls followed that example? She would be without a scullery-maid, and her cook would certainly leave."

Here was chaos confronting us again!

"To do our duty in that station of life to which we are called," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, "is all that is required of us": and I went away with a confused impression that in this, and no doubt in other cases, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's friend, "a *perfect* disciplinarian," was good enough to act as the voice whereby her inferiors were "called" by a wise Providence.

VI.

The Beauty of Simplicity

IN a boudoir crowded with photos, mirrors, small tables, screens, and other etceteras, lounging in the easiest of basket chairs, and regaling myself with the most fragrant of tea and the daintiest of cakes, I was initiated into the delights of simplicity. The sights, sounds, and smells of our poorest neighbourhood still haunted me. Half an hour before, a sick woman had confessed, stammering hoarsely at my ear, that she had no food for her dying child. Now Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's lulling voice warned me against the dangers of yielding to a love of luxury. I smiled grimly to myself, not seeing that I was in any immediate peril, but remembered in time that unsuspected dangers are the most dangerous, and I took my instruction with humility.

"Simplicity," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "is the highest refinement. Look at the Greeks!"

I couldn't. As I have said before, I am so slow in seeing things, and the Greeks, I understand, have a history extending over a lengthy period, and

showing many changes at different times. I feared, therefore, that a snap-shot, as it were, at the Greeks might give me a wrong impression. In the end I looked at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe instead. She was very charming and simple, in something which

"A SICK WOMAN HAD CONFESSED THAT SHE HAD NO FOOD FOR HER DYING CHILD."

might be Greek for anything I knew to the contrary, but which certainly showed the hand of Madame Chiffon—a hand, let me tell you, that leaves its mark on her customers' bank-books, as well as upon their backs.

"What are the merits of simplicity?" I asked in

all innocence, and, for the first, and I fear the last, time, I believe that I staggered Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Really, Dr. Tregenna, where have you been educated?"

"Here!" I said; "and my education is being completed. What are the merits of simplicity?"

"Simplicity is a sign of refinement, don't you know."

"And of a long purse very often, I should think," I sighed. "I'm afraid some virtues, in their most delightful forms, are expensive. I think, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, that I must, for the time, experiment on simplicity in some other form. Simplicity of manner is perhaps less extravagant than simplicity of dress?"

"With a good heart and a simple manner," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me, "one can mix with *any* society."

"Ay, but with what result?" I asked, thirsting for knowledge.

"Kind hearts are more than coronets," she went on impressively, and I was duly impressed.

"How neatly you put things!" I said. "Are they really, though?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe nodded her head with emphasis.

"They are happier too, Dr. Tregenna. The

dear Duke assured me once that he would gladly change places with his poorest tenant."

"Why didn't he?" I asked innocently. "I 'd have taken on the coronet."

I saw "Duty" writ large on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's face before her lips uttered a syllable. She presently said it, in a way clearly showing that she valued conscientiousness, and was sorry for my obvious want of it.

"*Noblesse oblige!*" she went on, and once more I was struck by her happy knack of producing the appropriate word of wisdom.

"*Honi soit qui mal y pense,*" I rejoined, not that, on consideration, this sounded particularly fresh or appropriate, but because silence might have seemed unsympathetic.

It appeared to be the right thing, for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said "Quite so!" with great emphasis. "I believe you insist, however," I told her, "on carrying simplicity into dress as well as into other things."

"Dress is the outward and visible sign," she said earnestly. "Only this morning I was at the committee meeting of a Charity Organization, where blue ribbon was suggested for the orphan girls' summer hats! I said, 'No,' Dr. Tregenna."

"Who suggested such a thing?" I asked.

"One of those lady artists. Some of them are

so clever, and so nice, you know, I 'm always delighted to see them in my house, though one often doesn't really know who they are—their people, I mean. But they 're very delightful and unpractical, and they 've the queerest ideas, I 've heard. I suppose they pick them up in the Paris studios, don't you know."

"THEY 'VE THE QUEEREST IDEAS, I 'VE HEARD."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's voice dropped a little at "Paris studios," so in answering "Really!" mine dropped too.

"The children did not get their blue ribbon?" I asked anxiously, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shook her head.

"What I said was this," she told me: "'These girls are not accustomed to these

things.' It might be the thin end of the wedge. It would distract their attention from higher things, Dr. Tregenna. Then you know what the average girl is?" I raised both hands in horrified denial, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on. "The next thing would have been a rivalry among them!"

"I can hardly believe it," I said. The secrets of the prison house were distressing me beyond measure.

"Oh, it's quite true. There would have been a twisting of bows, I promise you, and a changing of breadths. Anything to be different from one's fellows. Why, even a monogram in white was suggested!"

"This is too much!" I murmured, though I scarcely heard.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe uses her hands very effectively in conversation, and I was fascinated at that moment by the sight of a superb opal which I had not seen before.

"Then, look at the effect on their relatives!"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you," I admitted. The fact is that my attention was concentrated on the ring.

"They go out at stated intervals," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe explained, "and see their friends if they have any. Why, imagine the effect on

other girls, if these charity orphans flaunted round in blue ribbons and monograms. What would it lead to?"

"Parricide!" I said, and changed the subject.

"I can't help admiring your opal, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. I think opals the most beautiful of stones."

"Yes—er——" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe seemed to have a suspicion of some incongruity.

"The fact is," she explained, "I always insist on economy and prudence in money matters—and this is my latest investment. The superstition about opals is dying out, don't you know, and they're rising very much in value. My husband wanted to ask his brother about bicycle shares, but I told him opals were best. I know," she went on meditatively, "that one runs the risk of being accused of extravagance and all sorts of things, and Mr. De la Rue Smythe did seem to think I ought not to wear it. But, as I told him, we know very well what was said of the man who hid his talents in a napkin."

I was working out this application as I said good-bye, and almost unconsciously returned to the blue-ribbon question.

"They didn't get it?" I said absently.

"No, and I'm glad for another reason. I had bought straw hats for my children with that identical

shade of ribbon to match their dresses, and a monogram in white. It wouldn't *do*, you know."

"Certainly not!" I said, coming down the stairs. "These levelling tendencies must be seen to."

VII.

On Art in Relation to Life

I THOUGHT, for some time, that I should fail altogether in my attempt to get Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's important views on this important subject. I pressed for them in vain. "What," she asked me earnestly, "is the use of discussing perspective and such things, with the nineteenth century in its death-throes?"

Art had never been put before me in that light before, and I confessed that to discuss perspective under such conditions did seem callous. Besides, I know nothing of perspective.

"I *love* Art," she went on to assure me. "At school I was told I had quite a talent for it, and when I sat for my portrait" (here she cast a glance at herself as depicted by Brush, R.A., and shown in last year's Academy), "we talked of nothing else. I assure you Mr. Brush did not seem half so fond of talking about it as I was. But a woman in my position must give up something. Of course I always see

the galleries. One must be ready to talk of these things. They may lead to something deeper."

As for me, I was out of my depth already, and floundering.

If this was Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's mood, even of the moment, and if it was serious, I must respect it. But if it was her mood, it changed, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe gave the politest and most refined little yawn.

"The dear Bishop," she said, "went this morning"; and then I remembered that, at this our time of conversation, it was May—and I nearly whistled.

"You didn't meet him, I think?" she went on, and I said "No," without any unkind reminder that I had not been asked.

"A saint, Dr. Tregenna, a perfect saint," and she yawned politely again. Evidently high altitudes had been trying.

(I happened a few weeks later to be introduced to the Bishop. I mentioned Mrs. De la Rue Smythe as a mutual acquaintance, and almost fancied that his lordship stifled a yawn, too, and that his kindly expression grew a trifle chastened. Pedestals are as trying as other high altitudes, I imagine.)

"As you know," I said, "I am quite ignorant

"MY PORTRAIT."—*p.* 53.

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of Art; but in this, as in other things, I am ready to learn, if not too stupid."

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked at me doubtfully.

"There are very few people who really understand Art," she explained.

"Well," I said humbly, "I'd like to have a shot. Let's take a little bit of Art, painting for example."

"Er—life on a high plane is necessary, Dr. Tregenna,—and a high ideal."

"Bishops," I ejaculated, and stifled the words with a cough. "That is understood," I assured her with dignity, "but afterwards,—which comes first, form or colour?"

"Neither."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said this with great emphasis. I know that I have noted many of her sage remarks as made with emphasis. But I can't help that. She is always emphatic in conversation (when on vital topics like these), and I find that her correspondence, of which I treasure examples, is liberally underlined. Having said "Neither," she leant back in her chair and waited, reminding me of days "er, some time ago," as she would have said, when a patient governess did her best to make me think for myself.

"Subject?" I said hopefully, but I was wrong again.

"Motive," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me gently. "That is the first thing. Is the motive good? The rest will follow."

"Really!"

"Yes. Of course, form and colour must not be neglected. Subject has its value, but Motive comes first."

I opened my mouth to say "Really" again, but, remembering that I had just uttered that useful and uncompromising word, I refrained, and sat in silence.

"Is that commonly understood?" I said at last.

"Certainly not. How can it be? Mere prettiness is what most people like. How few have the insight, or even the patience, to find out what the true artist *means!*"

"True," I said; "for some works of Art, I daresay, one would need a great deal of both those qualities."

"Does a picture appeal to one's higher self?" she went on. "That is the test to apply, Dr. Tregenna."

"The pavement artist may rank high then," I said meditatively.

"He *may*" (with some caution).

"As I came," I continued, "I saw on the pavement a wonderful chalk drawing of ribs of beef, so-called plainly underneath, to avoid error. Also the words 'Help a poor struggling artist!' Now, this appealed to my pity, possibly my higher self."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe hesitated.

"These forms of Art——" she said, and stopped.

I gave her a helping hand.

"The motive, I imagine," I went on, "was, however, purely sordid."

"Precisely what I was going to tell you, Dr. Tregenna. That, of course, settles the question at once."

"I fear," I said, "that Art and Virtue have certain difficulties in common. An independent income would seem a safeguard in the pursuit of both?" But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was inexpressibly shocked.

"How can you say so? It only shows how ignorant you are—of Art at *any* rate. Some of our greatest artists have been poor."

"And their motive never sordid," I said, as I searched for my hat. "Thank you so much, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe! Did you have any chat with the Bishop on Art?"

"Our conversation," said Mrs. De la Rue

Smythe rather stiffly, and with a pained expression, "was altogether on more serious topics."

When, later, I noticed the air with which his lordship received the name of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I recollected that he had spent a week

"IN CONVERSATION ON SERIOUS TOPICS."

with her in conversation on serious topics, and I wondered whether his expression would have been different if the conversation had been more varied.

I remember hearing him say to a friend that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was a woman with an excellent Motive, which, I suppose, comes first in other things besides Art.

VIII.

Peace or War?

IT was on one of the finest days of this fine summer, that I made my way once more to call on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. A patient about whom I had been anxious had just reported himself as cured, and although I reminded myself carefully of the difference between *post* and *propter*, yet that, and the sunshine, made me ready to be at peace with all men.

"All men," includes Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with whom, lately, I had been at war, or at any rate skirmishing.

I now brought her a message and a souvenir, and hoped that I might be received graciously, since the message, from my cousin Trethewy, ran as follows:—

"The next time you call on that awfully jolly little woman, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, will you please give her my very kindest regards, and ask if she will do me the honour to accept the thing herewith, as a souvenir of the jolliest Sunday I

ever spent in Paris,—which is saying a good deal. 'When in Rome,' you know! She rose to the idea of the Continental Sunday like a brick. I don't know how to put it properly, but I'm sure you can."

"Of course I can," I said, after reading this, and accordingly, that afternoon saw me at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's door, with the "thing herewith" in my pocket.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, in a dress that somehow or other, goodness knows how, suggested a sisterhood, received me with marked coolness, and turned to the maid at once.

"Please remember that at half-past four (it was now 4.15) I expect the Bishop, and shall not be at home to callers after that. Is it any use offering you tea, Dr. Tregenna?"

"Thank you, I should like some," I said, looking for a comfortable chair. While some chairs in that room are perfect, there are others which I find it safest to look upon as purely ornamental.

When I had found one that suited me I sat down, and waited a little for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe to give me a lead. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, however, sat with a resigned air, her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes fixed upon me—except when they turned to the clock.

At last I spoke, and after making brilliant and

original remarks on the weather and other equally interesting topics, I said:

"I heard from my cousin this morning."

"Really? I don't think I have the pleasure of knowing any of your people, have I?" and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, raising two fingers to her lips, yawned rather obviously, and looked at the clock again.

I think that if she had said what she felt, she would have expressed surprise at hearing that I had any people for her to know.

"You've met Pickles, I think," I said cheerfully. "He says so, at any rate."

"*Pickles?*" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's voice expressed a refined disgust.

"May I ask, Dr. Tregenna, if your cousin, Mr. —ah, Pickles, has any other name?"

"Oh, yes," I said, beaming upon her unabashed. "We always called him Pickles, you know, because of the trade. My uncle made his cash in curries and so forth. His name's Trethewy."

"Sir John Trethewy?"

"That's his name. City Alderman, Lord Mayor, public character, political force, recognition of services, baronetcy, and so on."

I spoke disjointedly, the tea having come, and I being both lazy and thirsty.

"Nonsense! He's far too young."

"It was his father, of course, who was Lord Mayor," I explained. "He profits by it, though."

"He's a *nice* boy," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said approvingly.

"Yes," I agreed, "so he is. But you must have noticed the family likeness? I'm told it's pretty strong, allowing for my being the older man."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe put up her glasses and surveyed me critically, shaking her head at last.

"*His* nose is straight," she explained, "and *his* hair is thick and curly. Then, when *he* smiles——" but I stopped her.

"Pray don't trouble!" I said. "Some people can't trace a likeness except in twins!"

"What does the Boy say about me?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, ignoring my remark. Now, no doubt she is a model wife and mother; but somehow, when a woman persists in calling a man a boy, I feel that she is dangerously deceiving herself, if not others.

"He's not a boy," I told her. "He's twenty-five."

"Some men are always boys," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, serenely, "just as others are always idiots!"

I didn't think of any appropriate answer to this, so I read the passage that referred to her, while she beamed upon me, and I felt that there was

peace once more between us. Just when I reached the word "brick" his lordship was announced.

Of course I had to stop for a moment. We both rose, and I gave him my chair. When I had found another for myself I also found, to my surprise, that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was still standing. Then I remembered her pretty broad hint that she wished to be alone with the Bishop—but I also remembered that I hadn't finished the letter, or given up the souvenir, and that his lordship was sure to know Pickles.

I asked him, and he said yes. He also said that Pickles was a pleasant young fellow, a typical Englishman who, if he had the opportunity, would make his country proud of him some day.

"Frolicsome, of course," said the dear old fellow, shaking a well-silvered head. "Young blood, sir, young blood! A little inclined to kick over the traces, as a sporting man might say, but a charming fellow. If he only had the advantage of a little friendly advice from our hostess here. If he only had the privilege of an occasional chat, sir, such as you and I have——"

"Oh, they've met," I said. "In fact I was just giving a message to Mrs. Smythe when you came. Since you know my cousin perhaps you will excuse me if I finish reading the note. He writes a very good letter."

"By all means," said his lordship.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said something too, but I can't tell what it was. I was in a hurry anyway, and I couldn't find the place.

"Never mind," I said at last. "Here's the beginning of the piece, and I know it's not long. I'll just read it through quickly"—and I began:—"'The next time you call'"—only to find that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was still saying something, and didn't stop for me. She asked the Bishop whether he would have two lumps or one, were the tea-cakes hot, or should she send down for more, till his lordship, courteously ready to hear both of us, and slightly deaf, got quite confused.

When I found that she really wished to say something I stopped, of course, but went on when all her questions had been answered, and all his lordship's wants supplied.

"'The next time you call,'" I read.

"Don't bother about that now, Dr. Tregenna," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said. (By-the-by, it's a long name, but those who wish to please her get into the habit of using the whole—or else they never reach the Inner Circle.)

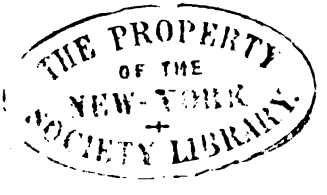
"Not in the least!" I told her. "'The next time you call on'"—and just at that moment the tea-table upset!

It's a most extraordinary thing. I never, in all

my life, saw Mrs. De la Rue Smythe do such an awkward thing before. She got up hastily with the cake-basket (I didn't want any, and the Bishop had bread and butter), and over went the whole affair. Most of the tea went over her dress. I saw the thing coming and hopped away, but his lordship got a little, and that was bewailed by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe as though it were irreparable. True, Smythe doesn't wear gaiters.

When the maid had finished mopping things up, I found myself saying good-bye, and shaking hands with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, though I cannot recollect what had made me think I must go.

When I got outside I remembered that I hadn't finished the letter, and that the "thing herewith" was still in my pocket. So I must go back again. For some reason or other I've a vague doubt whether I've made my peace with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after all. If not, I must try again, for she's a very clever woman in some ways,—though she was so stupid about that tea-table.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IX.

On Simplicity

PERHAPS I ought to have sent the "thing herewith" to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after our last interview, but I decided to try my luck once more, and risk the consequences.

Directly I got within sight of her door, I saw that there were others before me. The Bullions' carriage, fat horses, fat coachman, floury footman, gaudy coat of arms and all, showed very conspicuously in a blazing afternoon sun, and I crept meekly up the stair, feeling that I was about to enter Society, and wondering whether, before Society, I should get the wigging which I thought I deserved.

Not at all! I was received, figuratively speaking, with open arms by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and when I had realized my good fortune, and before I could quite rise to the occasion, I was still further astounded by finding that Mrs. Bullion, whose acquaintance I can barely claim, was also regarding me with favour.

Mildred Bullion was the only other person there, and she, after the necessary greeting, watched the point of her pretty shoe with concentrated attention and a frown.

Finding that, except for Mildred, there was a sense of genial sunshine indoors as well as out, I took heart.

"I have come to finish Pickles' message," I said, "and to make peace."

"Wicked man!" and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shook a warning forefinger at me. "Be good now, then"; and somehow I got the impression that Pickles' message might wait, and acted upon it.

"We were speaking of you and your cousin," she went on; "Mrs. Bullion and Mildred know him very well."

"I don't," remarked Mildred rather abruptly; "I only saw him for about a week."

"A week is quite long enough," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured her, smiling, "when young people are thrown together, and are unspoiled by hateful conventionalities."

Conventionalities certainly don't seem to trouble Mildred very much. She turned with a small shrug to her mother, and said that she thought they ought to be going, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had touched a sensitive chord of recollec-

tion, and murmured—I had almost said babbled, on——

"Ah! those happy days, before a hard world hardens us, before an insincere world makes us distrustful! Oh, happy child!"

"Eighteen last birthday!" Mildred announced. "Mother, we really *must* go."

"Silly child!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smiled indulgently. "It is not a question of age. I myself feel young sometimes."

"No!"

The "No" was my contribution, and I wish, once for all, to take this opportunity of protesting against the phrase "A plain Yes or No." The meaning of either may be anything but plain, if the word be used hurriedly. I swear that what I meant was to utter a fervent, an indignant protest against this implied assumption of age by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. I am led to fear, by the paroxysm of coughing which overpowered Mildred Bullion, that she interpreted otherwise, but her hurried and apologetic explanation of crumbs can be accepted by those who choose.

They rose to go, and Mrs. Bullion smiled on me. She is a tall, thin woman, with an air of suppressed grievances, and when she smiles, I always feel the sort of shock which I should

expect to have if I got treacle out of a vinegar bottle. She further astonished me by complaining that they never saw me now, and by begging me to keep the afternoon of the 18th free. Then they left, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who had insisted upon pecking the obviously reluctant Mildred on both cheeks, sank back into her chair with a groan of relief.

"The dear child!" she sighed. "What a pity she has not had a better training! Do you mind ringing? I really must have some fresh tea made after *that*."

"After what?" I asked anxiously, doing as I was told.

"Every position in Society entails disagreeable duties" (with a weary smile). "I may be silly, Dr. Tregenna, but I sometimes grudge the time wasted in conventional chatter."

"But what's wrong with the girl's training?" I asked. "She doesn't seem overpoweringly conventional."

"Perhaps I was wrong to blame her training. Money cannot procure everything after all. As a scientist you know, my dear doctor, that blood tells in the end. But that's not her fault."

"I don't see anything wrong," I insisted; for which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe pitied me very much.

"I can't help it," I said, "I don't see anything. I think she's a very good sort of girl, and she's certainly pretty."

"*Peut-être!*" and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shrugged her shoulders.

Why she didn't say "Perhaps," or "Maybe," or "I don't think so," in plain English, I can't tell you. It's an aggravating way of hers, and she went on:

"After all, one can't say, don't you know. Perhaps it's only her unfortunate manner, and her way of dressing, that spoil her."

I sighed, and was silent, feeling that I was not Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's peer in such a discussion; but she was dissatisfied.

"You can't pretend that she dresses well."

"I am no authority," I said meekly. "Instruct me," which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe straightway proceeded to do.

"Simplicity, Dr. Tregenna, is the highest form of art."

"Is it?" I said. "Proceed, Mrs. Smythe."

"Dressing, Dr. Tregenna, is an art, though of course a minor one. You don't believe it, and of course know nothing about it, and you dress badly."

"Impecuniosity," I pleaded. "Go on, and leave me out of the question as hopeless."

"Mildred dresses badly, too. Whatever she does she overdoes. Then, too, jewels are barbaric."

I stared, this being a new departure, and found that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was, indeed, dressing up to her ideal. Her wedding ring, for example, was the only ornament upon the plump hand which supported her chin. On her right hand, with the forefinger of which she as usual gracefully emphasized her points, there was nothing.

"I was always sure," I said to myself (audibly), "that rings were blemishes on a pretty hand!" And Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smiled a pensive smile.

"Yes," she told me, with an air of chastened simplicity, "for all women who really think, there comes a time when trinkets are put aside, being cared for no more. I have given up jewels."

"I also shall never wear them," I said, with, I trust, the air of a sincere convert. It was not worth while saying that I couldn't afford to, anyway; and, full of this idea of simplicity in all things, I rose to go.

"By-the-by," Mrs. Smythe suddenly recollected, "didn't you say that you had something for me from the Boy?"

It was true, and I produced a small packet, registered.

"Since Pickles has chosen to send it through me," I said, "will you open the thing and let me know that it 's all right?"

But the seals and strings made the opening difficult, and my penknife was called into requisition.

First the string was cut and the seals broken; then under the outside wrappers came a cardboard box. The opened box showed white fleecy wool—and then—oh! sad disappointment for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, came diamonds!!

Mrs. Smythe sat down swiftly, and said "Oh!" twice, and then there was a silence, while she looked at them and I at her.

"It's a pity," I said softly at last, "for the Boy can quite well afford a souvenir of this kind, and no doubt they're very good—for that sort of thing—and if your husband has met Pickles he will feel that there is no earthly reason why he should object to your taking them; and Pickles will be disappointed—but it does not matter," and my hand moved slowly to the box.

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and her hand was quicker than mine.

"'For all women who really think, there comes a time when trinkets are put aside, being cared

"HER HAND WAS QUICKER THAN MINE."—*p.* 74.

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for no more.' You have given up jewels," I reminded her.

"Rubbish!" and then, weakly: "It would *hurt* him."

"I'll put that right," I said politely. "He's in England again, but I'll tell him that a pair of gloves, shall I say long suèdes, six and a quarter, will be quite as much valued, and will be *worn*, while these——!" I held out my hand for them again.

"He couldn't return them," explained Mrs. Smythe.

"He could keep them for the time," I said; "I understand that diamonds are a good investment. Or, stay, he might, later, offer them to Mildred. You say that she is not above such trifles, and that they're great chums."

"I'll write to him myself. Good-bye," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and I was obliged to come away.

In the street, just outside, I met De la Rue Smythe, who is a clever man, and understands his wife a great deal better than I do.

"Hullo, Tregenna!" he said, stopping to shake hands, "I've not seen you for an age. What have you been doing lately?"

"Studying ancient history," I said.

"Another hobby, eh? You've too many for

a poor man, my dear fellow. Where have you been?"

"In the Garden of Eden," I said sadly. "I wanted to study what some folks call the Great Serpent Myth. It wasn't an Apple, Smythe. It was a Diamond of the First Water."

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

On Governesses

"THERE has been a great deal of nonsense talked," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "in the *Westminster Gazette*, on Governesses. Who is interested?"

I thought carefully. I was afraid to own that I had friends in that class lest she should withhold her views, always valuable.

I held my peace, and, as usually happens when I am wise enough to do so, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, not particularly anxious for my opinions, proceeded to give me her own.

"You know how silly I am," she went on.

"I beg your pardon," I stammered.

"You know how sensitive I am."

That was another way of putting it, and one that I could understand. "Yes," I said carefully, "I know how sensitive you are"; and I think I do.

"Well," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "with every wish to feel for those who deserve it, I

may tell you that this question of the treatment of Governesses is grossly misunderstood and misstated by them."

"The other side," I said, feeling for my notebook, "has not been heard. You are well known by reputation. If I could only persuade you to

"'I HAVE HAD EIGHT ALTOGETHER.'"

give me your views"; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe consented.

"I ought to know about them," she continued, as I sharpened a pencil, "I have had eight altogether."

I thought how interesting it would be to get the histories of these birds of passage, what hope and promise of sunshine brought them, what frosts and storms set them again on the wing;

but I felt that even the reputation of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe could not command the space necessary for the publishing of such a lengthy record.

I contented myself with the hope of being edified thereby later, and waited for generalities.

"In the first place," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after meditation, during which a finger tip rested against her lips, as though forbidding rash eloquence, "In the first place, one may consider why women become governesses."

"I have often wondered," I said heartily, and commended her for starting at the root of the matter.

"I am a firm believer," Mrs. Smythe said, "in Providence."

This generous admission, an unsolicited testimonial, would, I was sure, be of the greatest use to Providence when applying for any situation where the highest references were required. I muttered something expressive of my feelings, and waited for more.

"I believe, even when I don't understand," said Mrs. Smythe. "Now, what do you suppose is a woman's duty as a governess?"

"To teach!" I said glibly.

"To learn!" returned Mrs. Smythe, with emphasis, and gave me time to adopt this view.

"It's a queer thing," I said at last, "that a woman should be paid to learn!"

"Quite so!" returned Mrs. De la Rue Smythe triumphantly.

"That's exactly what I say, Dr. Tregenna. If things were as they should be, a governess would pay to come here, instead of expecting me to give her pretty nearly as much as I would give a first-class cook, whom one can't, really, do without, besides a home, cultivated society, and so on."

This argument was so forcible that I harked back to a point yet unexplained.

"I don't quite understand," I admitted, "what you meant about Providence," and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, whose constant regret is that I, lacking intuition, need to have everything explained, proceeded to detail.

"When one sees a woman in any position of life, high or low," she told me, "one does not pity or envy. One simply knows that she is there for a purpose. That is certain. One may see sometimes, if one considers carefully, what that purpose is."

"And——?"

"And I cannot help thinking, when a woman comes to me, she is sent to learn something."

"What, when she goes away?" I asked, natur-

ally, and rather thought that I had put a poser—but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was unperturbed.

"Either she has learnt her lesson or—I often fear, she refuses it, and goes elsewhere to learn a harder one."

"Goes farther and fares worse," I said, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe replied:

"Precisely."

"What," I asked with some hesitation, "would you suppose they had to learn as a rule?" and Mrs. Smythe shook her head with considerable vehemence.

"Everything, very often!" she sighed. "But if they only learnt their place, one could put up with the rest."

I mentally noted that, for a governess, humility was likely to be more serviceable than knowledge.

"How does this fault show itself?" I asked.

"They are so ridiculously self-conscious and opinionated. What I say is that I don't pay for their opinions, and don't want them."

"I'm sure you don't," I agreed; "but if you happen to remember any of them?"

"Oh, I could give you dozens, only they're so silly. These people have such opinions of themselves. Now I don't suppose that you remember Miss Green?"

I remembered her very well—I knew her to be the daughter of an officer who had died in action, and to be at home in society quite as refined as ours.

"What of her?" I asked carelessly.

"She was the most perverse creature, and selfish! She thought of no one's convenience but her own."

"I didn't imagine it of her," I admitted.

"No? Well I've told you before that you're a baby in these things. I'll prove it this time. Do you remember, since you remember her, that you took her down to dinner one night? I was so sorry I had no one else for you. I remember I apologized."

"She was very pleasant and entertaining," I said.

"She chattered dreadfully, I know. No one would have thought she was my governess. In fact, I recollect old Lady Plushe asking me."

"She was quiet enough for a time," I said. "The soup was a damper."

"Ah! I remember. Into her lap, wasn't it? These servants are so careless. As I asked them afterwards, what should I have done if it had been over Lady Plushe! Yes, she sulked a little I know, and what do you think happened next day?"

I was inclined to suggest the presentation of

a new dress, or something equally sympathetic, but I always guess the wrong thing, so contented myself with confessing that I didn't know.

"We had another dinner," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me, "and at the last moment a telegram came from Bell Spanker. She'd sprained her ankle, biking. That left us thirteen at table!"

Such a catastrophe was enough to appal anyone. I know many people, even in the highest circles (of those in which I have the privilege of moving), who would go dinnerless rather than be of thirteen. It isn't because they despise their dinners, I assure you.

"Well," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, after a moment's silent recollection, "of course, it being too late to ask any friend, I thought of Miss Green, and looked in the nursery on my way to dress. You'd hardly believe it. She refused to come down!"

I gasped, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe and I confronted one another in horror, she being aghast even at the recollection.

"She pretended that she had nothing fit for wear," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, "as if anyone would notice her."

"'My dear creature,' I told her (I spoke as nicely as possible, though you can imagine how I felt), 'you can come to the drawing-room when

I ring, and cover most of the front breadth of your dress—so! I will be near the door with the gentleman who must take you down. Dinner will be announced at the same time, and then you can cover it with your napkin. Mr. Tremblett is so short-sighted, and shy, that I really don't think he'd know if you had no dress on at all.'

"She refused, Dr. Tregenna, saying she had a headache. I told her that, of course, I shouldn't want her in the drawing-room after, though it was sometimes quite useful to have her there, to play while we chatted until the men came up; but it was all of no use. I couldn't stay arguing all night, and so I gave it up."

"What did you do?" I asked, much interested in seeing how such a difficulty could be dealt with, by such a genius as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Oh," she said, "I managed. I sent a note round to Mrs. Smith (the John Smiths you know). I knew she was working heaven and earth to get those girls of hers into our set, so I put the whole thing before her, and asked whether one of them might come that night, as well as coming with her sister the following month. That's how I put it, and she came all right, and did very well considering."

"Of course, the girl wouldn't mind obliging you," I said, as I rose, "knowing that she was

coming again in the usual way a month later. I 've no doubt she enjoyed it."

"Oh, no doubt. It was quite a change for her, and of course, as you say, she didn't mind. I decided that I needn't give a dinner the month after (some relative died I think), so *that* was all right."

"What of Miss Green?" I asked, my hand on the door.

"Oh, if a governess won't make herself useful, what can one do? Of course she had to go. I don't think she 'll get such a place again."

"No more do I," I acknowledged; "I heard last week that she was married."

XI.

On Charity

MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE was occupied, when next I was shown into her boudoir, and gazed at me abstractedly from her armchair, while holding a sheet of paper in one hand, and in the other her gold pencil-case. With the tip of this she occasionally and absent-mindedly accentuated a very pleasing dimple in her chin, and her expression was one of rapt consideration.

"Poetry?" I asked softly, with the awed feeling of a complete outsider.

"No, not just now," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe acknowledged, and looked abstractedly at a chair, which I translated into an invitation to be seated. I sat accordingly, and after a little further indentation of the dimple, and some scribbling, she threw the paper down with a sigh, and told me to ring for tea. "One's work is never done," she announced, and I tried to look sympathetic.

"What is it this time?"

"A charity ball, and they 're such a trouble!"

"Why do you have anything to do with them?" I asked innocently.

The question was absurd. I should have remembered what it is that regulates all the actions of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, but she is supremely patient, and never tires of telling me.

"One's position entails these things," she said wearily.

"But," I urged, anxious to relieve her, "can't some one less busy take your place?"

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, setting her lips firmly at the thought of what was before her, said:

"No. It's such expense too," she sighed. "Tickets are two guineas, and my dress will cost pounds."

"Heavens!" I cried, "and I'm sure you'd much rather send the money and stay away. Can't you do that? In a woman of your position it would be a striking example."

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe could not be decoyed from the path of duty, and shook her head.

"It would be misunderstood," she explained. "People would think me Puritanical, and I should lose Influence": which disaster, one felt at once, must be avoided at all costs.

"Well," I allowed, "I know nothing of these

things. Can I help you while drinking my tea, or have you finished that paper?"

"It 's finished, but you can look at it if you like," and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe handed the paper across.

"Those are the names of a sort of general committee," she explained. "People to ask here next week, don't you know, to elect an executive."

I looked down the list, and so far as I knew anything of the society stars therein, it seemed to bear out the notion that charity covers a multitude of sins.

"Mrs. Rackitt?" I said dubiously.

"She 's splendid at arranging the cotillon," Mrs. Smythe hastened to assure me, "and so good-natured."

"Major Raikes!" I murmured, almost to myself, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was eager to explain.

"He has quite changed," she said. "He has been going to everything of this kind lately, since he came into his uncle's property. I believe he feels that he 's getting middle-aged, and thinks of marrying."

I 'm not sure whether it was a laugh, or a rather strong expression, that I stopped with a cough.

I said no more, but drank some tea, and looked again.

"I know," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe severely,

when I handed back the list, "that you are going to object to young Scampard."

"I'm not," I said. "He belongs to a county family, doesn't he?"

"Quite true!" Mrs. Smythe agreed approvingly. "I wouldn't hurt his people for anything. It would be most unchristian."

"I didn't know he was home again," I said, "and as far as that goes, I never knew why he went away."

"Everyone in our set knew," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me. "It was because of a designing woman; but we won't say anything about her, because she died, quite providentially, and he has come back with such pleasant little foreign ways! I tell Mr. De la Rue Smythe I'm quite enchanted with him."

Just then De la Rue Smythe came in,—an unusual thing for him so early in the afternoon, and asked for some tea.

"Are you helping?" he asked me.

"No, I don't think I am," I admitted. "Mrs. Smythe knows just what she wants, I think." At which Smythe laughed a little grimly, and took up the list.

"What are you going as?" I asked.

"My wife's husband," he said, looking at her with a whimsical sort of grin. "Or perhaps I shall

take it into my head to stay at home and have a romp with the youngsters." And he went on looking at the list.

"He means well," said Mrs. Smythe, nodding indulgently. "Don't you, dear? But you professional men, if you aren't looked after, get a bit narrow, don't you know, Dr. Tregenna. He'd say,—er, 'Charity begins at home,' or something like that, and think the thing settled; but he leaves these things very much to me, don't you, my dear?"

"Very much!" assented Smythe, looking up with his finger on the list. "But look here, I wish you'd take off that woman Barker."

"My dear Charles!" Mrs. Smythe's astonishment was unbounded.

"You know very well what a liar the woman is." Smythe continued.

"She exaggerates, I know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe allowed; "but she's very useful. I know some people daren't refuse her anything. Besides, one must be charitable, and I know she goes to a great many nice houses."

"I have reason to know that you don't escape her tongue."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, smiling angelically. "I hear that she never talks of nonentities!"

"She says you're insufferably proud," Smythe went on.

"Of you, dear?" retorted Mrs. Smythe amiably.

"Abominably conceited."

"Not surely about my poor self!" said Mrs. Smythe, quite unruffled. "Really, her Christian charity is unequalled!"

"She also says," I chimed in, "that you paint, Mrs. Smythe!"

"Really!"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was both startled and amused.

She had, while listening to her husband, half turned her back upon me, but now, such was her astonishment, that she wheeled completely round and faced me, so that the daylight fell directly upon her face.

It showed what I already knew perfectly well, that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe did not yet need any artificial complexion.

"Really!" she repeated, closing her eyes a little under the afternoon sun. "Anything more, Dr. Tregenna?"

I shook my head, but De la Rue Smythe, still watching her, made a last shot.

"Nothing more that really matters," he admitted. "In fact, what I heard more was rather complimentary."

"A compliment from Miss Barker! Do let me hear it?"

"Oh, it's nothing! She only said that she wished she knew your secret, and that considering you'd never see thirty-eight again, you were a wonderful woman."

"I can forgive exaggeration," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with dignity, taking up the paper; "but one owes it to society not to encourage wilful perjury!"

And Miss Barker's name is no longer on her list.

XII.

On Love and Matrimony

"IT 's pork, I tell you!"

"And I tell you it isn't. It's a South African gold mine!"

Now I have been told, and have frequently been forced to realize, that appearances are deceitful, but I think I can tell the difference between these two articles mentioned; so I stopped short, in passing through the club smoking-room, and sat down by the two men who were disputing.

"Don't fight," I said; "I 'll give you a diagnosis free of charge. Gold mines, especially when falling, produce a jaundiced appearance, while pork——"

Becker and Lee, the two men concerned, scoffed at me, and Becker called me a jolly old humbug. It is one of my greatest trials, this determination on the part of many not to take me seriously.

"I daresay he knows, though," said Lee, surveying me critically.

"Bet you he doesn't!" said Becker; and when I had modestly selected a lemon squash as my drink,

it was decided that the man who was wrong in his estimate of my knowledge should pay for it.

"Proceed, gentlemen," I said, lighting a cigarette as an aid to judicial impartiality.

"Been to see your friend Mrs. Smythe lately?" asked Becker.

"Don't forget the De la Rue," added Lee, and they waited impatiently while I sipped my lemon squash and thought the matter over.

Had I been to see Mrs. De la Rue Smythe lately? I pondered, and to my surprise found that I hadn't. She had instructed me further but once, since the day when, if I may say so, diamonds had damned her. (I use the term with apologies to Mr. William Watson and Abdul Hamid, who may perhaps consider it copyright.)

"I 've not seen the lady lately," I acknowledged; "not for six weeks, in fact."

"Told you so," said Becker, chuckling; and Lee, seeming to think that settled the matter, paid for my lemon squash.

"Now tell me what all this means," I demanded; and Becker, who declares himself to be a born story-teller (his friends use a stronger epithet) sat up to explain.

"Lee hasn't been there lately," he said; "no more have I, no more have you. Guess why!"

"I have not been," I said, "because it hasn't

occurred to me to go. You and Lee have not been because, well, in the home of Intellect and Progress——"

"Home of humbug!" Lee announced. "Do you know who's visiting there?"

"No."

"Miss Van Veldt!"

"Oh," I said, unimpressed, "and who is Miss Van Veldt when she's at home? Also, what's the connection with pork and gold mines?"

Then Becker became eloquent, and the gist of his eloquence was as follows. Miss Van Veldt was an heiress, likely to stay several months with the De la Rue Smythes, and to be launched upon society next season.

Miss Van Veldt was young, rich, and beautiful; and ineligibles like Becker, Lee, and myself would not be encouraged at the house, until Miss Van Veldt knew, as Becker put it, what's what. It was a question whether her fortune, of disgusting proportions, came from pork or from gold mines.

When the thing was clear to me, I emptied my tumbler, looked at my watch, threw away my cigarette end, and rose.

"Don't rush off in such a confounded hurry. Where are you going?"

"To call on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe," I said

firmly. "It's just half-past four, and I want some tea."

"She'll be 'Not at home.' What on earth are you going there for?"

"I am going," I told them, "because I have just remembered that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe has promised to instruct me on Love and Matrimony."

Then I left with, I trust, the air of a seeker after truth, and a quarter of an hour later I rang at Mrs. Smythe's door.

"Stewart," the product, it may be remembered, of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's theories on Name and Occupation, surveyed me with some indecision. But with a preoccupied air I stepped in, and was shown to an apparently empty room.

It was not until Stewart had retreated to find Mrs. Smythe, that the curtain was swept aside from a window seat, and a young lady stepped out.

I rose from my chair and bowed. She returned the bow, and seemed undecided whether or not to leave the room.

"Miss Van Veldt, I expect," I said; and then I introduced myself just to save Mrs. De la Rue Smythe the trouble.

"You've come for a conversation, I guess," said the young lady; from which I "guessed" that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had spoken of our conferences, and I said so.

"That's so," I was told at once. "You'll make the world spin, between you, before you've done. Won't you, now?"

I modestly said that we hoped to do some good, at which the girl laughed. Her mouth was rather large, her teeth were splendid. I began to feel friendly.

"What are you on to-day?"

"Love and Matrimony," I told her, not seeing any reason for concealment, and stood looking at her with what, I believe, was an expression of childlike and innocent confidence. As for her, she broke into smiles and then blushed. Why, I didn't know, but it was very pleasant to see, and I watched her approvingly. She looked at me, and then at the window seat, then at me again.

"I'll stay right here," she said at last, and moved back towards the window, watching me as she did so.

"No," I said, "Mrs. Smythe mayn't like that."

"She won't know."

"She must; I must tell her. It would *never* do."

"Why? I'm sure she says nothing one oughtn't to hear."

"Good gracious, no!" I said; "only——" and at that moment the door-handle turned. There was an instant's pause while Mrs. Smythe gave some direction outside.

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Miss Van Veldt disappeared; I sat down.

"Mind," I said softly, glaring at the curtain, "I reserve to myself the right of calling upon you at any moment——" and the door opened, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe came in.

She looked around the room as she came toward me, and seemed, I thought, relieved to see no one but myself.

"The right of calling upon me at any moment. My dear Dr. Tregenna, what do you mean?"

"Did I say that?" I stammered; "I was thinking of something else"; and Mrs. Smythe sat down with her back to the window.

"You will excuse me, I know, for telling you that I have to go out directly we've had a cup of tea," she said. "I mention this because I see your note book."

"You might give me just an outline," I pleaded. "A sketch. Some main points which we could talk over in detail next time." Mrs. De la Rue Smythe sighed the sigh of a martyr to Duty, and resigned herself.

"I want a few ideas on Love and Matrimony," I said, and waited rather anxiously to see the effect.

"Love and Matrimony!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked at me in wonder. "What next?"

"I don't know," I admitted; "but do favour me!

I want the subject treated with Delicacy and—er—Taste, don't you know"; and that settled the matter.

"Love," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe softly, "rules the world, Dr. Tregenna." I seemed to have heard so before, but somehow Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's way of putting things is so convincing, that I felt this to be the dawn of the millennium, and in rapt ecstasy refused sugar and cream for my tea, as though Love sweetened all. Fortunately some blunders can be rectified. I, as it were absent-mindedly, helped myself to both, while begging Mrs. De la Rue Smythe for further guidance along these flowery paths.

"I know," I said, "that the royalty and aristocracy of all nations are guided entirely by affection in their alliances. This I believe is the touch of nature which makes us feel our kinship when it is properly treated, as it always is, by the press. But do you think that—well, say a professional man, should allow himself to be affected by such weakness?"

"I *knew* it!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and bending forward she laid a finger on my coat sleeve.

"Who is it?"

When I tell you that I didn't know, you will readily understand that I couldn't tell Mrs. De

la Rue Smythe. I tried to blush, but couldn't, so I turned my head aside, and after a moment's ingenuous hesitation, vowed there was nobody.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shook her head and smiled. "I may be a simple woman," she said, "but you can't deceive me in a thing like that." So I promised that I wouldn't try any more, but begged to be excused from giving her the name just then. She sat back in her chair again, smiling upon me with an air of superior wisdom.

"I knew *someone* would have you," she announced; and I could not and cannot tell what to make of that remark.

A man is "had" when he is swindled. On the other hand there are things which one refuses to "have" at any price. I knew by experience that it was of no use asking her to explain; so I smiled, idiotically I have no doubt, and said nothing.

"I wondered why you hadn't been to see me for so long," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on; "now I know."

"So do I!" I thought, remembering the fortune in pork, and the silent figure behind the curtain; but what I said was: "Yes, I think you do"; and then I begged her to drop the topic of my personal affairs.

"Nothing is settled yet," I said shyly, with a dim memory of past conversations with friends who

meditated matrimony; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's delighted remark, "That 's what you all say," made me feel that I had profited by experience.

"It 's a fact, I assure you," I said earnestly.

"Is she young?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, almost tenderly.

"She 's not old," I said evasively. Seeing that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had created her less than five minutes before, I didn't see how she could be.

"Pretty?"

"I 'm no judge," I declared modestly; "but I 've never heard her called plain"; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe beamed more than ever, then suddenly grew serious.

"One thing more," she said; "I hope, I do hope, she 's not as poor as you say you are!"

Now it has always been my intention, my fixed determination, ever since I was put into knickerbockers, to marry no one less than a princess. None of your duchesses or maids of honour for me! Being a princess, she will necessarily be young, lovely, and preposterously rich; though of course that won't make any difference to my feelings. She will observe my love and my merits at sight, and just ask me to be hers. I shall be recognized by her parents as a born monarch, and we shall in due course reign, and live happily ever afterwards. Don't think me egotistical for mentioning

these things. I merely do so in order that you may see I was justified, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe asked if the lady was poor, in answering, "Certainly not," with considerable hauteur.

"Not," I said, recollecting I was an ardent lover, "that *that* would make any difference." And then, beginning to feel that I was being drawn into a quandary, and that I had better not be tempted to further details: "I 'm surprised at you, Mrs. Smythe!" I said coldly; "I never thought you would consider that point at all."

"For one's friends," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me, continuing to beam, "one considers many things that one would never think of for oneself. I *do* think, Dr. Tregenna, when judging for a friend, that there should be money on one side."

"That makes the bargain uneven," I suggested, but Mrs. Smythe waxed generously indignant.

"Bargain!" she ejaculated. "One would think we talked of trade, instead of Love! Your expression is from the market. As if men or women were bought and sold!"

I was shocked and apologetic.

"It 's the sort of expression one picks up, and uses without meaning it in its usual sense," I explained.

"It comes from your horrid clubs," said Mrs. De

la Rue Smythe, mollified, but still slightly ruffled. "I didn't expect to hear it from *you*. If it had been that friend of yours, Mr. Becker, or Mr. Lee, I shouldn't have been so surprised." At which I grinned inwardly, and wished I could see my way to letting Becker and Lee have the advantage of this wholesome criticism. But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on.

"Don't misunderstand me. Even when I say that, for my friends, I wish to see a little money on one side or the other of every matrimonial engagement, I only look upon it as the means to a worthy end."

"I 'm so dull," I admitted, with an eye on the curtain, which was much disturbed. "Please explain!"

"All I ask, even for my friends," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, leaning back in her chair with eyes closed, as if she were calling up a delightful vision, "is that, if possible, they shall have the means necessary to live the Simple Life of which one dreams,—the leisure necessary for Development."

The curtain was taking up so much of my attention, that I failed to respond as quickly as Mrs. Smythe expected.

"You follow me?" she asked, suddenly opening her eyes, and I said, "Oh, certainly!" and

wondered why the young woman from Chicago couldn't keep still.

While I wondered the door opened, and Stewart appeared. "A person to see you, ma'am, from Madame Chiffon."

I was not sorry, my anxiety concerning the curtain was so great; but I groaned.

"If it's anyone from there," I said bitterly, "I suppose we may as well give it up for to-day."

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Smythe.

"I'm very thirsty and tired," I said. "Unless you are going to see the messenger here, perhaps I may stay and finish my tea? Of course, I mustn't detain you."

"Oh, stay by all means," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and hurried away.

I gave myself a fresh cup of tea.

"You can come out," I said gruffly; and Miss Van Veldt emerged almost before the words were out of my mouth, and was shaking hands enthusiastically before I knew what she was going to do.

"I'm so grateful, you can't think!" she whispered. "You've helped me so much! I shall *never* forget it, NEVER!"

"Very well," I said, not knowing what else to say. "Have some tea?" but she refused. "I must go at once," she told me; "I have an appoint-

ment." And the next moment I was discontentedly sipping my tea in solitude.

"I 'll see that girl again," I promised myself as I strolled down the street—but I never did. When I called less than a week later, I was told that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was not well, and had been ordered south for a change. At the club Becker told me the cause of her ill-health. Miss Van Veldt, having become acquainted with young Broksby, a subaltern with nothing but his pay, had married him. In a letter, left on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's dressing-table, she had said that she hesitated until the last moment, for fear of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's displeasure, but was now sure that she would have her entire sympathy, and had kept it secret only that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe might not be responsible.

Before Mrs. De la Rue Smythe left for the south, she weepingly declared that she had no notion what the girl meant by saying such things.

I 'm not going to tell her.

XIII

On Pride of Birth

AFTER the trouble with Miss Van Veldt, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, as I have said, was ordered south.

I managed to get a fortnight in the country, but had been at work again for some time, before I saw that the brown paper was removed from the windows of the De la Rue Smythes' house.

Mrs. Smythe's health was to all appearance completely restored, and she was very witty over some people whom she had met.

"It is very silly and old-fashioned, I know," she concluded, "and not at all scientific; but one can't help feeling thankful that one comes of a good family."

"One is allowed to be proud of his father; why not, say, of his great-grandfather?"

"True, Dr. Tregenna! That's very nicely put, and after all, we can't help it, can we?"

I could not speak authoritatively on that point, and

we meditated in silence, presumably on the glories of our ancestors.

"The fact," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe argumentatively, "that an ancestor of mine led his men at Hastings, is no credit to me."

"Still," I pointed out, "it is not against you."

"No, that is quite true, Dr. Tregenna! And what I feel is, that if the memory of what they did spurs us on to higher aims, to prove ourselves undegenerate, surely our ancestry has its use."

"It incites to courage!" I cried enthusiastically.

"To self-denial," murmured Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"*Sans peur!*" I insisted.

"*Et sans reproche*," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe gently. "Though I fear," she added, smiling and shaking her head, "some of them were sad reprobates!"

"They are responsible, I have no doubt," I said severely, "for a great deal of that recklessness, if I may be so rude as to say so, of that absolute indifference to public opinion, that, if I may be allowed the expression, sometimes seems so criminally foolhardy in you."

"One *is* foolish sometimes," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe allowed. "Our weaknesses are the last to go, of the family possessions."

This I felt to be indescribably sad.

"The *haute noblesse* gets pushed out of sight by reason of its shy exclusiveness," I said respectfully. "It's always New Men and Old Acres."

"Yes," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe sighed. "For us there are practically no acres left. Our last extensive property went, oh, long ago! As far back, even, as good Queen Bess, Dr. Tregenna."

"Is it possible?" I said, a brilliant idea practically amounting to inspiration striking me. "Can it be," I asked, "that 'there's Rue for you' (you remember the passage, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe?); "can it possibly be that that passage may have reference to the granting of your acres to a stranger?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe considered a moment to ensure accuracy, and then allowed that I was possibly right.

"We were much about the Court," she said; and we sighed together over the days that are no more, without my troubling her to tell me whether the Court was that of Denmark.

"All gone?" I repeated.

"All but a few acres," lamented Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. "You know Somersby?"

"Not at all!" I acknowledged.

"Ah! well, it's a sweet village, unspoilt as yet, and there an aunt of mine holds a little plot of ground that is still ours. Small, Dr. Tregenna,

very small, but ample for a grave for the last of the De la Rues."

Now I hate sentiment; I 'm so tender-hearted that it makes me feel tearful, and I could only gaze fixedly into my tea-cup, and clutch at another piece of bread and butter.

"Yes," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, as she watched me take it. "We still get our butter sent up from there. So sweet and so yellow it is, reminding me always of the buttercups which as a child I so often picked there."

"Splendid butter!" I said appreciatively, and Smythe coming in just as I spoke, agreed with me.

"I 'm proud to have a relative who makes such butter," he said. "Mary" (Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's autograph is Marie), "I 've had no lunch, and your square inches of bread and butter there won't do. Give me tea, and I 'll have up the loaf and cut for myself."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shrugged her shoulders and poured out a cup, while Smythe rang the bell.

"A loaf, a pat of butter, and some cheese, please," he told Stewart.

"*No* cheese," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe coldly; and Smythe, after opening his mouth, I think to protest, looked at her and drank his tea instead.

Presently the bread came, and the butter, a fresh yellow pat stamped with some quaint design.

I admired it, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had grown irresponsive, and talked of the British Association, while Smythe cut great slices and ate ravenously.

So things were when Miss Barker was announced.

She came in gushingly, and kissed Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with emphasis.

"And what have you been doing lately?" she asked directly she had settled down. There was an air of suppressed excitement and satisfaction about her that was interesting.

"There is always so much to do, isn't there?" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, smiling upon her.

"Yes," said Miss Barker with emphasis. "What with Charity Balls and so on, you look quite done up! Really, you should go to the country for a rest. Women of your age can't do more than a certain amount without suffering for it."

"You have been away?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe politely.

"To the sweetest place!" announced Miss Barker enthusiastically. "But you know it. Somersby, my dear Mrs. Smythe!"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe leant back, and I

thought a little spasm passed over her face. Then she bent forward, smiling bravely.

"Yes," she said, "I know Somersby a little."

"Such charming people! Do you know that butter there, with its dear old print, reminds me that I made the acquaintance of your aunt, Miss Street, you know. When she found that I was a friend of yours, she showed me over her dairy, and was most kind. I used to go into the shop almost every day, and order my own eggs and butter and cream, and so on. She was so glad to talk about you. But I never could understand where she got the name Street from. Genealogies always puzzle me, though I think them most interesting."

Just then another caller came, and Miss Barker having announced her interest in genealogies, I gave her mine in detail, allowing my imagination a certain amount of play where memory failed me. She was not so enthralled as one would expect; but I kept her fully occupied, and she came away with me because it began to rain, and I suddenly recollected that I needed a cab, which would take me past her door.

XIV.

On Manners

MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE had been rehearsing for private theatricals when I saw her last.

I forget what the play is, but it's one of the old comedies, and there is a minuet in it. That, however, is no guide to naming the play, for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe and some other ladies have lately learnt the minuet, and it has to be introduced, anyhow. Old comedies made her sigh for old ways and manners, and she lamented to me that she feared manners had deteriorated, when knee-breeches and the sword went out of fashion. "Gentlemen," she said, "are, I am afraid, no longer what they were."

"I fear not," I agreed mournfully. "I couldn't drink from two o'clock until bed-time, even if my reputation as a gentleman depended on it. But you mustn't blame us altogether, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. If we haven't our ancestors' powers we have the gout."

"I was referring to manners and accomplishments, Dr. Tregenna, not to the faults of the age. Can you dance a minuet, or a gavotte, or use a small sword?"

"The gloves or singlesticks are more in my line," I admitted; "but remember, if we had lived in the happy days you think of, I might only have met your ladyship as your hairdresser."

"Good gracious, what nonsense!"

"A barber surgeon," I insisted, "could not have hoped to meet a fashionable lady on any other footing than when called on to beautify or bleed her."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked distinctly shocked, regarding it from that point of view; she seemed almost wondering whether the lapse of a century or two, justified her in admitting me into her confidence.

"Of course," I said wickedly, "one must remember that your husband's position would not have been what it is now, and your time would have been spent mostly in the kitchen!"

I saw "never" most distinctly formed on her lips, and felt that the blood of the De la Rues was protesting against any such degradation.

"Of course," I admitted, "your fortune might have been altogether different"; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe gave me to understand plainly that it would have been.

"But," she continued, "a man's attitude is not what it was toward a lady."

"I believe not," I told her, and was inclined to enlarge upon that point, with examples from the comedies which might be our guide, but I held my tongue.

"What man, nowadays," continued Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with a mournful air, "knows how to salute a lady properly?"

"One might at least learn," I said humbly, with a bashful eye upon her cheek; but Mrs. de la Rue Smythe did not offer a lesson.

"As I say," she insisted with great distinctness, "men do not now know even how to bow to a lady properly." (I blushed apologetically for my blunder.) "Then, too, there are none of those little differences by which a gentleman

should mark his respect for the rank of the lady he addresses."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe here eyed me severely, and I feared that I knew what was coming.

"One feels," I explained, "that so much respect is due to any lady. Why should I be more polite to a duchess than to you?"

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was not to be appeased.

"I introduced you to a Miss Rose the other night."

"Miss May Rose," I interrupted. "I've not had a chance of thanking you. She was splendid! Such a jolly——"

I was stopped by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, uplifting a hand.

"Spare me," she said. "May I go on?"

I murmured that she might, of course, but that I was anxious to express my gratitude.

"Gratitude, Dr. Tregenna," said Mrs. Smythe, with a pathetic melancholy, "shows itself best in deeds, not words. I found old Lady Plushe alone."

"I know you told me to take her down to supper," I said, feeling that further evasion was useless; "but I assure you that she had been down already. I saw her having a grand feed an hour before."

"Did you ask her to go down?" demanded Mrs. De la Rue Smythe coldly.

"I——well, I said to her that you had asked me to take her down, but that I knew she had been down already, and that Miss Rose hadn't. I said I was sure she would like the girl to go first, and that I would see if I might have the pleasure of taking her down later."

"What did she say?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe icily.

"Well, I didn't quite catch what she said. But what could she say, except that I must take Miss Rose? I know people don't think much of Lady Plushe's manners, but, still, she can't be as bad as that."

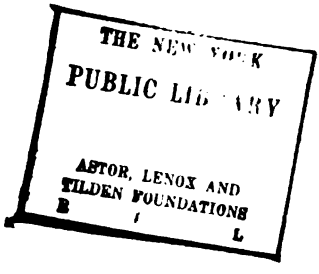
I sat expectant, while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe weighed her words in silence.

"I wanted Lady Plushe," she said at last, "to taste the trifle. She's very fond of it, and the careless fellow who took her down never got her any."

"It was splendid trifle," I assured Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"I wanted her particularly," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "for reasons which I need not explain, to have an enjoyable evening. I brought her down myself therefore. You know what happened."

SOCIETY BOWS.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"I had got Miss Rose the last of the trifle," I acknowledged. "She enjoyed it so much; and we couldn't understand why Lady Plushe glared so."

"She was dreadfully angry," explained Mrs. De la Rue Smythe in awe-struck tones. "When I told her that it was all gone, she wouldn't have anything else, and I don't know that I shall get her here again. She told me that she thought 'At Homes' were mixed nowadays, and that girls came out now who ought to be learning manners in the schoolroom. I don't expect so much from that little girl Rose, but where were your manners?"

"Perhaps, like Lady Plushe, I hadn't brought my best," I said politely; "I didn't know that one needed a special set for titled dames."

"Some others," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "may not know what they can claim. But I can tell you that it's different with her."

"Do I understand," I demanded, "that Society expects me to bow down because she's titled, ill-mannered, and bad-tempered?"

"Society bows," said Mrs. de la Rue Smythe sagely, "and people who are down on their faces before anything, naturally don't care to see anyone else standing upright. You will find it pays to do like everybody else. It's very rude to differ from Society,—and *very* dangerous."

I came away feeling that unless I could alter my doubting attitude towards Society, as understood by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I was likely to have the privilege of her tuition withdrawn.

XV.

A Secret

RIVATE.

"DEAR DR. TREGENNA,

"I want to see you *so* much. *Why* haven't you been here for so long? I wish to have a chat about something *most important.* Lunch with me to-morrow. Mr. De la Rue Smythe will be *away*, so we can talk quietly. *Don't tell a soul!*

"Yours hurriedly,

"MARIE DE LA RUE SMYTHE."

I found the note upon my breakfast table—its violet scent greeting me as I sat down, and mixing with the odour of coffee and fried bacon.

Now I am not accustomed to receive such messages. Some men, I know, are. They have hinted as much to me, with the *sang-froid* resulting from familiarity; but then—as they are usually

ready to acknowledge—each of them has some special small advantage of height, form, feature or *finesse*. One must not boast of these things. They are accidents; but the wise man, I understand, avails himself of the accidents of life, and does not pretend to ignore their existence; neither do those men of whom I speak.

"So," I said to myself, "it has come at last, has it?" for I was thinking of my very young days, when I used to wonder whether ever a woman would stretch out her hand to me. "It has come at last!"

"You're late, and it's getting cold, sir!"

I started at words so terribly ominous, and found that my landlady was playing the oracle at my elbow. She was concerned for my breakfast only, but I took her verdict as applicable to other things, and shrugged my shoulders.

"Yes," I said, "too late!" and sat down to eat.

The *bouquet de violets*, or whatever the scent might be, still, however, hung about me, and, being associated in my mind with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, soon conjured up a shadowy likeness of her.

"Retro Sathanas!" I muttered impolitely, and was reminding myself of the welcome always accorded me by Smythe, when, rising to reach the mustard, I glared into the large mirror upon the

far side of the room. I hate mirrors, and try to cover mine with receipted accounts, but they—mirrors as well as receipts—have their uses.

What I saw sent me into a peal of laughter, which drove my landlady flying from the room. I concerned myself no more about Smythe's peace of mind. The mirror certified that it was in no danger of being disturbed by me, and, since violets

"I FOUND THE NOTE UPON MY BREAKFAST TABLE."—*p.* 123.

don't mix well with bacon, I tossed the note across the room to be considered later.

Of course I decided to go, if only to find out the reason for all this secrecy. Curiosity is not woman's monopoly. Accordingly I so arranged my affairs that one o'clock found me within a hundred yards of the Smythes' door, and strolling carelessly towards it. Now, it must be remembered that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had demanded secrecy. I felt bound to grant it, but being, I

believe, of a frank if not babbling nature, I was uncomfortable in consequence, and, I daresay, went along with an air not altogether easy. For anything I knew, some curious neighbour might play the spy upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe and her callers, and chatter afterwards to Smythe himself. This would be a silly business and quite needlessly unpleasant. I would much rather meet Smythe beforehand, so that he might know where I was going—then there would be nothing to mind. I *did* meet him, at that moment, and suddenly realized that I minded very much. The hundred yards had become fifty, I was within sight of the house, when suddenly the door opened, and Smythe, running light-heartedly down the steps, came towards me.

The man was clearly unaware that his wife had any secret which he did not share—still less one which she wished to confide only to me. He came along humming a tune, and patting into place a fresh white rosebud, that showed to perfection against his well-fitting dark coat.

"Heavens!" I thought. "Placed there by her own hand, with a smile, no doubt, not five minutes ago! Now she watches behind the curtain, perhaps in tears!"

Smythe came on, and nodded in a friendly way. I nodded too, and was passing, when I thought

that might seem peculiar, and I stopped to shake hands.

"Going to my house?" asked Smythe, still arranging his rose.

"Oh! perhaps I might look in, if Mrs. Smythe's at home," I said, with what I hope was an easy air of gratitude for the suggestion. "But it's about her lunch time, isn't it?" I added.

"Of course, of course!" said Smythe, staring a little. "She's expecting you, you know. At least, so I understood her to say just now. A great secret, I believe. Don't let her take up too much of your time. I shall hear all about it to-night, I suppose"; and with that went his way calmly, while I, having taken time to recover myself, passed into the presence of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

I must say that I was not altogether pleased. Of course I thanked heaven that there was no secret to keep, and that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe hid nothing from her husband. Still, she had caused me unnecessary discomfort, and, though I made no complaint as I shook hands, I am afraid that I determined not to forget it.

I was hungry, and the lunch was very good—so was Mrs. De la Rue Smythe!

When, remembering one of my many weaknesses, she ordered coffee to be brought to what

she calls her study, and taking me there told me I might have a cigarette, I almost forgave her.

"If I were king," I said dreamily—checking a vague desire to draw up my feet and sit cross-legged on the sofa like a nabob-pickle picture—"If I were king, or even Minister of Finance, tobacco and coffee should be duty-free."

"I hope you aren't going to sleep!" said Mrs. Smythe apprehensively.

"Peace, wo——" I began with a dignified gesture. Then, suddenly remembering the conventionalities of a western civilization, I stopped short and apologized. "Your coffee and cigarettes are both so good," I explained hurriedly, "that they take me back to Constantinople."

(I had once spent half a day there—most of it in a ship chandler's.)

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe clasped her hands ecstatically.

"Delightful!" she told me. "I never knew that you had been such a traveller. What romance! Did you have any adventures?"

"'Adventures are to the adventurous,'" I quoted with an air of mystery, and forgot to mention, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe applauded, that the words were not my own.

"You can give me colour!" she announced.

"Pardon!" I insisted, rather surprised, and with a respectful glance. "To paint the lily?"

"*Local* colour!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe emphatically, and I stopped, feeling very much "at sea."

"I am here," I said presently, "in obedience to your command."

"Suggestion," interpolated Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"The same thing to me," I insisted politely. "May I know now in what way I can be of use to you?"

"You haven't told anyone, I hope!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, fixing a piercing glance upon me.

"No one!" I assured her airily. "No one, that is, but your husband."

It was now my turn to wither Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with a sarcastic smile—and she did flush slightly, which is perhaps antecedent to withering.

"Oh, he doesn't count," she told me impatiently. I let my upper lip curl, and I slowly drew from my pocket the violet-scented note. But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe would have none of it.

"Am I to understand," she asked me—rising from her chair, and drawing herself to her full height—am I to suppose that you suspect me,

Dr. Tregenna, of being capable of keeping anything from my husband?"

"I am sure you cannot!" I admitted hurriedly, and at last pacified Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who stayed her virtuous indignation, and told me what follows.

XVI.

A Revelation

"WE all have our ambitions," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe; "though they change as we do."

"That's quite true," I agreed. "When I was ten I burned to hit a cat, just one, with a catapult. It was my catapult that was burnt next, because the windows suffered so much more than the cats."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's hand was not large enough to cover the yawn with which she greeted these reminiscences.

"Later," I said dreamily, watching the smoke of my cigarette disperse and disappear, "there was an odalisque—when I was in Constantinople, you know."

"I was speaking of worthy ambitions," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe a trifle coldly. "Have you any?"

"None!" I told her, with humility. "I know it's wrong, or at any rate a sign of age and

weakness; but I have no ambition left—at least, one only."

"What is that?"

"To place my poor abilities at your feet," I said, with as graceful a bow as I could make in a sitting posture; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with a pleased smile directed at the tip of a very small red leather shoe, said that I grew sillier every day, but that she believed I could be trusted to do my best.

"I confess," she told me, "that I am still ambitious."

"Ah, youth!" I murmured, but was told, with another smile, not to interrupt.

"You will promise not to say anything to anybody?"

"I have promised," I reminded her, "several times. Shall I swear?"

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe decidedly. "Now, listen! You know that a wise man (I don't remember who he was) declared that everybody could write at least one book!"

"I've heard it said that someone said so," I acknowledged. "Had he been a publisher I fancy he'd have qualified that statement. But what of it?"

"If one can write one, surely two can?" suggested Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"It has been done," I said hastily; "but there are great risks, and it has nearly always ended in trouble."

"Of what kind?"

"Well," I said feebly, not being quite prepared for the question, "there seems a sort of fatality about it, don't you know! One of them always dies."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"It's a fact," I said, nodding my head gloomily at her, and much encouraged by the success of my objection.

"Well, but," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after reflection, "that must happen anyway."

Personally I believed that to be the case, so I collapsed, and murmured that on considering the matter I supposed she was right.

"They should have tastes and sympathies in common," I told her with firmness.

"Not at all," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with equal assurance; "they must be totally different in every way—so as to supply one another's deficiencies, you know."

"True," I allowed, with another bow, "where there are any. But undoubtedly their sex must be the same, so that there may be no bar to free discussion and avowal of opinion. Conventional courtesies would be out of place."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe looked daggers at me. "I could mention some," she said sweetly, "who are not overburdened by respect for, or observance of, conventional courtesies. May I ask whether you decline to collaborate, Dr. Tregenna? If so, further discussion will be useless, and I need not occupy your valuable time."

"My stupidity!" I explained precipitately, "and my modesty. Who would have dreamt of you going down into the arena of authorship—or of your asking my help when there? What branch of literature do you propose to take in hand?"

"That," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, leaning toward me with a confidential air, "is just what I want you to discuss with me first. What is your strong point?"

"Oh, I'm just as good at one thing as at another," I told her airily, bearing in mind a certain drawer of my desk where literary efforts of all kinds, from poems (?) to parodies, having met with precisely the same verdict all round, now lay sleeping—undisturbed.

"What would you think me best fitted for?"

"I should certainly try a mystery story first," I said, remembering the violet-scented note.

"You think I could manage a plot well?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, evidently rather pleased.

"I am sure," I told her, "that you would be equally good at making one out of nothing, and at unravelling it afterwards."

"I didn't know that you thought so well of my capabilities," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe simply; "I think you might have told me that before."

"I was never so sure of it until to-day," I explained; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe murmured, with some slight show of irritation, that men really take a long time to see things, and even then it is ten to one if they speak until they are made to.

"If I had seen anything to praise in you," she remarked, "I would have told you of it long ago." And my gratitude was too great for words.

"To begin with," I suggested, when I had recovered my equanimity, "one must hear of your object in writing. It will be easier then to decide what form your work shall take. What do you want to say?"

This was a new point of view for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and evidently puzzled her. There were so many things, she gave me to understand.

"It is not as though one's interests were narrow," she pointed out. "One would be glad to do good and to instruct in any way."

"Without any hope of pecuniary profit," I nodded. "Well, I, too, will try to be altruistic

for once. We will content ourselves with a choice audience. We will write for the few!"

"Yes, presently," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe agreed; "but my idea is to do something lighter first. In that way we shall get to know a publisher, or an editor, and make the money necessary for publishing something really good."

"Shall we?" I asked humbly. "I should like to——" and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said she was certain we should. "We will laugh," she told me, "at some of the silly people we meet every day. We will whip them with ridicule," she continued, rising, and in her excitement brandishing her empty coffee cup over an imaginary but giddy throng; "we will hold up a mirror, in which they shall laugh ignorantly at their own silly selves."

"Brava! Bravissima!" I cried, waving my cigarette with enthusiasm, but keeping my seat, because I had a cup of coffee on my knee. "Something bold!"

"Original!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Sarcastic!"

"Brilliant!"

"Convincing!"

"Regenerating," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe firmly, as she sat down again. "There is many a true word spoken in jest, Dr. Tregenna. Some people can only be reached in that way. Then,

too, these lighter things will be best to begin with, because they are so popular; and I think we ought to start upon something easy, until we have had a little practice."

I had grave doubts about my ability to do anything easily, whether light or otherwise, and my small experience had given me no excuse for anticipating popularity; but I could not pretend to gauge the powers of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, so I nodded with what I intended to be a hopeful air, and told her we would do as she thought best.

"Then, too," she continued, "I am anxious to begin, but just now I've very little time. These lighter things, about your obelisk and so on, could be done at odd moments."

"While you wait?" I suggested, and let pass the matter of the "obelisk."

"Precisely. Those are the times, I should think, when the brighter, more sparkling little things are thrown off. Now, with regard to the lighter essayists and the poets—when do you suppose they get ideas?"

"While they shave, always," I said with conviction.

"Well, I've noticed certainly," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe remembered, "that not many of them are women."

"How could they be?" I asked indignantly.

"But some are," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe persisted after consideration, "and you wouldn't mean to insinuate that——!"

"I insinuate nothing," I said, rising in haste. "But I beg you not to be discouraged if you do not completely succeed in these essays. Success in these paths might, with generosity, be left to those of your sisters who are debarred from greater heights. I myself fancy that I might show more to advantage in more solid work."

"What on earth gave you that notion?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe in frank surprise. I fancy that in her mind my abilities and function as collaborateur are quite clearly defined. If ever I soar above the common herd, it is to be on the pinions (I had almost said the opinions!) of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe!

XVII.

The Cheiromantist

MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE once told me, with that inspired air which suits her so well, that Charity covers a multitude of sins, and I remembered this when called upon, a few days ago, to take an active part in a Charity Bazaar. I don't feel quite sure that I understand what was the object of that bazaar. I was assured that it was "worthy," and believe it was to send a mission to people who disliked missions, and would therefore make the business expensive. Hence the greater need for a bazaar; and, anyway, the lady who called upon me for help wouldn't go away until I had promised my assistance, and as hers was not an interesting personality, I had no wish to detain her. Besides, I had really been busy with work which had put a strain upon me. Life, death, expediency, and all sorts of *whys* had pushed themselves before me for consideration, and I was sick of asking myself unanswerable questions. So when I was told that the Renowned Somebody or Other,

who had been engaged to do the cheiromancy business, couldn't come, and that I was entreated to take his place, I agreed.

"I know nothing about the business," I told my fair visitor, "but I can take half-crowns, which, I suppose, is the principal thing. I saw the other day, though, that a woman was imprisoned for hand-reading among servant girls. I don't want that to happen in my case."

"Oh, it's quite safe because it's so different, you know," the ambassadress told me. "This will be among respectable people, you know, who don't believe in it; and, besides, the object is so worthy."

"Doing evil that good may come," I murmured; and then I said stiffly that I hoped there were no lotteries.

"Oh, dear, no! I'm so glad that you don't approve of such things, Dr. Tregenna. We shall have raffles, of course! No bazaar can get on without them,—but they're quite a different thing."

I didn't detain the lady for any explanation as to the difference. I took her word for it, as most people find it pleasantest to do for most things, and I promised that I would read as many hands as were shown to me.

"Of course it's not strictly correct to say one knows nothing about it," I admitted, as I opened

the door and said good-bye. "Everyone knows the elements, I suppose."

"There! I told them you had studied the science!" my visitor declared cheerfully. "But, of course, you won't tell me how much truth there is in it? I shall have to spend half-a-crown in judging for myself, I suppose"; and she fluttered away down the street, having promised to tell no one but the committee, and delighted with the success of her embassy.

So, three days later, I found myself seated in a tent which was covered with signs of the zodiac, and inscriptions copied roughly from Chinese tea-chests. I wore a black velveteen thing very like a tea-gown, a dunce's cap, and a lot of rings borrowed from a patient, besides a grey wig and a long white beard. The tent was darkened, and the one lamp was so shaded that its light would fall only upon my "subject," more perhaps upon the face than the hand. Here I waited, and found the time pass quickly enough while I listened to the remarks of some passers by, who saw, upon the outside of the tent, the advertisement of my powers, and commented thereupon with considerable freedom.

"Well, I think, if you ask me," said one shrill voice, "that this sort of thing is impious. I don't believe in trying to find out what's hid from us. If

this man knows anything—which I don't suppose for one moment—you may depend upon it that he has got help where you and I wouldn't care to go for it."

"Oh! mother! Perhaps he'll hear you."

"Well, my dear, I suppose he can't eat me. This is a Christian country, though you wouldn't think it, and perhaps he doesn't. Besides, he's not likely to understand what I'm saying. No countryman of ours would have dealings with such matters. He'll be Indian, or something of that sort."

"But mother, he *tells* you your fortune."

"Well, my dear, I can't help it—perhaps if he's listening it will make him *think*."

The voices died away, and presently another read my sign. "'Palmo! the wonderful Cheiromantist.' Well, I *didn't* think they would have that sort of thing here. *How* funny!"

"*What's* funny?"

"Why, *look!* here's a Cheiromantist. Now I've had a little one on my left foot that bothers me ever so much sometimes. It came just after mother made me get those nasty broad-toed hygienic shoes. A loose shoe *always* gives one corns. Oh! that's not the same thing, isn't it? Well, why don't they *say* so. I might have just wasted my money. I think bazaars are the silliest things!"

The next observer wondered whether I could help her to find the diamond that she lost last winter when the snow was on the ground, but thought it would only be throwing good money after bad, and so passed on.

Then came a man's voice, which seemed familiar. "H'm! Half-a-crown. We can get lies enough told us every day for nothing, can't we, Miss Dorothy?"

"I don't know, Sir Simon. I hear he's very clever."

Of course I knew who it was. Sir Simon Scratchitt, the richest man of the place, a widower nearer seventy than sixty, who was dangling about after little Dorothy Summers. Some people said he'd get her, with the help of the astute Mrs. Summers.

"Crabbed age and youth," I muttered. "If there's such a thing as Will-power, I'll have a talk with you, you turtle-dove!"

But apparently there was no such thing as available Will-power, in me at any rate.

"He must be very clever if he can get half-crowns out of people," I heard old Scratchitt say with a dry chuckle. "It's not easily done, I can tell you, Miss Dorothy. Come, I think I can see Mrs. Summers looking for us."

But Dorothy was loth to go.

"Don't you wait for me, Sir Simon," I heard her say. "I must spend some money somehow before I leave the place, and I daresay this will be funny."

"Funny!" the Baronet wheezed. "Funny! When I was young—that is, I don't think it is the sort of thing, my dear young lady. I really couldn't take the responsibility of letting you go in there alone."

"Well, I 'm going," Dorothy retorted, with the sudden spirit sometimes shown by the oppressed; and old Scratchitt still protesting that he could not leave her, they presently came in—he at her heels—and stood before me to my surprise and delight.

"Welcome!" I told them, "to Kedar's tents."

Why "Kedar's tents," I haven't the least idea, but I must confess that I was somewhat taken by surprise, and they were apparently too much excited to be critical; so I now sat quiet and stared at them unwinkingly, which I notice flusters many people.

"Daughter, seat thyself!" I said presently, pointing to the one low stool which was placed just before my judgment-seat; and poor little Dorothy, who was beginning to tremble, dropped on to the stool, leaving me to turn two staring eyes and all my attention upon her elderly escort.

"What wouldst *thou?*" I asked him severely, when I could make sure that I was able to speak without laughing.

"Is it for thyself, or for thy granddaughter, that thou comest?" Then, to cover the hysterical little gasp that came from the stool, I hurried on: "I would not keep old age standing. Thou shalt hear thy weird and go."

Truly my position gave me the whip-hand of Sir Simon, and I felt so completely his master that I flinched at the sight of his grey hairs, but remembered Dorothy, and continued majestically to demolish his argument that he had only come as escort.

"Youth and purity," I remarked sagely, "are a better escort than old age like thine and mine. Thou hast entered—thou must pay."

So Sir Simon, scowling, paid two half-crowns, and I insisted upon reading his dry, wrinkled palm first, doing so with great deliberation and apparent care, since I had to draw so largely upon my memory and imagination as I went.

I complimented him upon a most faithful disposition. He had married, I said, and still cherished in his heart the memory of the lady long since dead, but never to be supplanted. I spoke rather softly and in little jerks, so that Sir Simon, whose hearing is not so quick as it once was, should not

hear so readily as poor little Dorothy, and so should not rebel against Fate. Pointing vaguely, I showed how every appearance was against a second marriage, and remarking casually that the line of life seemed very much threatened at about seventy, but that a philosopher, as I said he was, needed no warning, I waved my hand toward the tent entrance. "Farewell, brother!" I told him. "At our age we can scarcely hope to meet again in this incarnation. Order thine earthly affairs wisely and with charity, that the burden of gold may not cling to thee on the ascent. I must speak to this child alone."

Sir Simon was apparently astonished at my assurance, and so, I confess, was I. But I sat quiet enough while he blustered, and I must say that my dignified and patriarchal appearance, as I saw it that moment in a mirror which I had placed conveniently, filled me with honest pride and a determination to assert myself uncompromisingly.

"There is yet more to be told from thy hand," I said coldly. "But 't were perhaps more conveniently told without witnesses. Still, if thou wilt not go, to wait within earshot——"

He went. Perhaps, Sir Simon being no such remarkable sinner, so far as I know, there are others beside him who would hesitate to decide, at a moment's notice, that they had absolutely

nothing which would be better hidden from their proposed lady-love.

He moved out, and I could see his long, black shadow, bent with hand to ear, thrown upon the tent canvas as I leaned forward and took Miss Dorothy's little hand. What a shapely hand, what a pretty one! I could not help but tell her so, bending over it more closely, and holding it more firmly, perhaps, than was absolutely necessary.

"What do you want to know?" I asked her. I was so ashamed of my duplicity when I held those dainty fingers and saw her great wondering eyes, that I quite forgot the "thee and thou"—which I hope shows I am not utterly without conscience, and may yet become a trustworthy member of respectable society. But Dorothy either didn't know, or else didn't want to say, what she would like to hear about—so I tried to tell the truth as far as I knew it.

"A great fortune will go with this hand," I said, softly, lest Sir Simon should hear and be made more amorous thereby.

"But," said Dorothy, "we've no money at all. I wish we had!"

"I stick to it," I said, forgetting my years, antique phraseology, and discretion. "Who gets this hand, freely given, gets good fortune and may be envied by kings."

"Oh!" said Dorothy, as if she would like to believe me, and was almost able to.

"I see your fate," I told her, tracing a line with my forefinger. "It is literally in your own hands, to make or to mar. Be patient and brave."

"Is anything going to happen?" asked Dorothy apprehensively.

"Yes," I declared, with an absolutely clear conscience. "See that it is nothing you will afterwards regret. It is you, no one else, who must live your own life. Be careful to whom you trust it."

"It's very hard to decide," said Dorothy, by this time half crying. So I patted her hand benevolently, and then her golden-brown head, and told her when in difficulties not to go to old people alone (or alone to old people, I forget which) for advice.

"Old folk don't always think as they did when they were young, my dear," I informed her, nodding my head sagely; "but it doesn't necessarily follow that when they were young they were wrong."

For this valuable and original apothegm little Miss Dorothy thanked me warmly.

As she rose to go her face came very close to mine, and I saw a tear twinkling on a long dark eyelash. I watched it, fascinated, and, as I watched, the eyelid quivered, and the tear rolled slowly down over a prettily blushing cheek. Dear me! I'm

glad that I 'm not a Father Confessor. It must often be a very trying post. The tear looked so pitiable—the cheek so kissable!

"Bless you, my child!" I said hastily. "Don't be rash, but at the same time don't be timid. You mustn't keep that old man waiting outside any longer"; and I packed her off—which reminds me, as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe has sometimes remarked *à propos* of nothing, that these are supposed to be conversations with that estimable lady—not with Miss Dorothy Summers. Still, I can't, or at any rate I won't, be always chattering of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. Besides, I 'm just coming to her, or, rather, she to me—for Dorothy had not left me three minutes, and I was still "gazing into the crystal," which was in the form of a tear left by Miss Dorothy upon the back of my hand, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe glided in.

XVIII.

The Biter Bit

SHE came with very much the air of being in church, and the reverence with which she greeted me was such as I had never been accustomed to receive. Then, at a silent gesture from me, she dropped noiselessly on to the stool.

Her veil was down. It was not easy to see anything more behind it than the gleam of her eyes; but I fancied her excited, and made a mental note of the tremulous way in which she fumbled at her gloves when I told her to take them both off.

When the two small plump hands lay palms upward before me, I felt that I could strike a telling blow at once, for there was no ring of any kind upon them. "Woman!" I asked solemnly, "art thou separated from thy lawful husband?" And Mrs. De la Rue Smythe gave a little shriek.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "Then there *is* something in it after all!" And I felt that I had scored.

"The common trick!" I said scornfully. "Take the ring which thou art ashamed of from thy purse, and replace it"; which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe did, with a jerk that made me wish I could see more clearly through a black veil. I had scored again in the matter of the purse, though certainly I did not feel inclined to appreciate my acuteness very highly, since the feminine pocket is apparently vestigial.

"The heart line," I told her, pursuing my investigation, "is curiously faint. I fear, daughter, that you have allowed others to give when you could give nothing in return. This must not recur."

"Men are so foolish!" sighed Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "and it is very hard to be rude. I'm sure I never give them any encouragement!"

"H'm!" I coughed dryly. "If this line were stronger there would not be so much risk."

"What a queer little line!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, peering at it. "Why, it's all broken up! What does it stand for?"

"The Head," I told her severely. "It is decidedly weak. Again Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's eyes flashed behind the veil; but, secure in my disguise, I went on remorselessly. "There seems," I said, "to be a certain amount of talent. But it is not well directed, or, indeed, concentrated upon

anything. Be wise, daughter, and—searching for some pursuit worth following—follow it to the full extent of your powers."

"Yes," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe humbly. "Can you give me any idea of the direction in which I am likely to do most good?"

"A certain facility of language is given to you," I allowed after further scrutiny. "But there is a want of precision and grasp of details, which makes literature impossible except with assistance."

"I can get that," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me with confidence.

"So I observe," I said, bending still closer over the hand to hide a smile. "I can see that there have been faltering steps upon Parnassus, and that you have had great help from a trustworthy friend."

"Not very much," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me, sighing. "I believe he does his best, but I don't think his abilities are equal to his good intentions."

"You had better try to find someone who will do better," I suggested bitterly, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said, with the air of a martyr, that she had thought so once or twice, and that she would certainly keep my advice in mind.

"There is what I think would be called incompatibility of temper," she told me mildly.

"I fear," I said with some severity, "that, from

what I see here, any fellow worker would have to bear with a great deal."

"I do get impatient with stupid people," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe acknowledged, with an appearance of frank contrition which was simply exasperating.

"I may not judge between you," I told her, wondering at the same time at my own self-restraint, and racking my brains for the lost ideas which her impertinence had scattered.

"I see Will," I told her in desperation after a long pause.

"I am so glad," murmured Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"It borders on obstinacy," I continued, "and, combined with largely developed self-esteem, threatens danger both to you and to your friends."

I had now caught the thread of my ideas again, and was proceeding in grand style, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe rose and dropped me a curtesy.

"Thank you, Dr. Tregenna," said she gravely. "I am afraid that if I monopolize you longer, several of our friends will have to go with their fortunes and their faults untold; and that would be a great pity, because you do it so well and so frankly."

With that she left, and I was so dumbfounded that I forgot, until she was out of the tent, that I

had never got her half-crown, and so had to take it out of my own pocket.

These things did not improve my temper, and I was so nettled by the time I had a visit from young Golightly, who really ought to have plucked up courage to propose weeks ago to Dorothy Summers, that all he got for his half-crown (I took them savagely in advance after Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's trick) was, "Oh! laggard in love. Go heavily for evermore!" which he didn't seem to think at all his money's-worth.

The next time that I met the person who had let me in for all this, I asked her who had been on her committee.

"Oh, let me see," she meditated, "there was Mrs. Turner and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and——"

"Thank you!" I told her, "I might have known!" And so I might have. It is at times like these, that I wonder whether our acquaintance affords the greater amusement to me,—or to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

XIX.

The New Crusade

I HAD been told of the insult lately offered to the blood of the De la Rues. At a recent dinner, precedence had been taken over Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, by the wife of a merely civic dignitary—a newly-created knight. I heard that the pretty speeches of the two ladies were perfect illustrations of feline amenity. I had not been surprised, remembering this incident, to find, when I next called upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, that she wavered between a longing for the Old Aristocracy and a yearning after the Democracy of the Future.

"In the old days," she informed me, "people at least knew their places."

"Did they?" I asked. "I was under the impression that they always had to be taught by their betters."

"One may meet one's grocer anywhere, nowadays," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe mournfully.

"It is true!" I agreed, with a sigh. "I met

mine in the cooling-room at the Turkish Bath only the other day. I might have taken him for a gentleman, if he hadn't opened his mouth to remind me that I owed him something. I left so quickly in consequence, that I caught cold."

"How can one escape these things?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe despairingly.

"By rising above them," I told her with emphasis (after I had ascertained that I was not being consulted professionally for a prophylactic to use against colds), and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was pleased by this graceful reference to the family motto of the De la Rues, which, as I think I have already mentioned, is "I rise."

"And yet," she reminded me, "the pictures drawn by some dear unpractical idealists, appeal to one's sense of the Beautiful and the True. One could wish that everybody was placed beyond the temptation of want, and able to live a happy life relieved from sordid cares, so long as they understood that did not make them Our equals"; and she and I sighed together, both agreeing in our love for the Ideal.

"It is true!" I acknowledged. "One's well-to-do acquaintances are so unfailingly Good, that one feels the millennium will be near at hand when everyone has, say, a thousand a year. I have long felt that Well-doing and Well-to-do are synonymous."

This was carrying one's views to extremes, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said so, remarking, with an air of reserve, that she could, if she liked, tell me stories of some among the wealthiest families I knew, which would make me wonder that Providence left them enough to keep them upon the face of the earth.

"The world has need of them," I suggested, with a recollection of Marcus Aurelius, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said she supposed so—but said it with an air that made one feel some things would be materially altered, no doubt for the better, if Providence took her into partnership.

"You have probably heard," she told me with a confidential air, "that my husband has been approached, informally, with a view to ascertaining whether he would accept knighthood. Well, I told him No! One cannot help seeing to what class of people these things are thrown. After all, what are these petty distinctions among people of refinement and intellect? Lady Flinkerby may go down to dinner before me (only think! They say her mother was a barmaid, and that Lady Flinkerby herself has drawn her pint of beer behind the counter before now!); but what does that matter, so long as she leaves enough on the table for me? Certainly her appetite alone is enough to stamp her, but, poor soul, she can't help that, and we can only

be sorry for her!" (I always pity those for whom Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is sorry. I am sure they well deserve it.)

"Besides," she added, "it never pays to hold oneself too cheaply. I tell him he may accept a baronetcy."

"Your moderation, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, is one of your many surprising qualities," I assured her; and Mrs. Smythe looking at me lazily from half-closed eyes, said, "Yes," in a tone which showed her own calm belief in my assertion.

"But," I reminded her, "not long since, you demonstrated to me beyond all further argument, that these titles are artificial distinctions, between classes which are practically One."

"Did I?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe calmly. "Well, perhaps I did. I don't see any reason to change my opinion."

"But——" I objected, and was, as usual, promptly corrected.

"You are beautifully simple," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with a weary but indulgent smile. "I really admire the honest way in which you own when you can't follow one. I am certain that if all men had as little power of concealing their difficulties (or, shall we say as little shame?), and were as ready to hear reason, they would talk far less about the fickleness and want of logic in woman. I would much rather have your honesty than other people's brains."

I imagined a brilliant retort there, but refrained from speech, fearing it to be more convincing than complimentary.

"I shall think the more highly of that since you have noticed it," I protested. "But explain!" And Mrs. De la Rue Smythe explained, in a word, with perfect satisfaction to herself.

"Since," she pointed out, "as I have said before, these titles are artificial distinctions between classes which are practically One; why—it follows that, to the intelligent person who accepts them, they make no difference. Therefore—why not take them?"

Having put the question, and its solution, into words which suited my feeble intellect, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe leant back in her chair and smiled blandly, while I, figuratively speaking, grovelled.

"Besides," she continued, when I was sufficiently abased, "there is, of course, another and a higher point of view"; and again I had to confess my dulness.

"There is no doubt, I am afraid," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, speaking now with most praiseworthy reluctance, "that here and there among the Titled Classes, there are, er—Black Sheep."

Knowing with what caution she would venture to make such a statement, being, if not the rose, at least daily nearer to it, I could only accept Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's verdict with silent awe.

"You will have to mix with them!" I suggested, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, serene in the consciousness of her strength, smiled, unafraid.

"We must not shrink," she declared firmly, "from the Duties of our Position. If the less praiseworthy among the Aristocracy are sometimes the most conspicuous, it is all the more necessary that their ranks should not be shunned by anyone who, er—might have opportunities of improving the general tone, and, er—raising the whole body in the eyes of the British Public. Now you understand my position."

I assured Mrs. De la Rue Smythe that she had made it perfectly clear to me. I begged her to let nothing turn her aside from this crusade, and I came away in order that I might consider calmly whether I should be altogether justified in refusing a title myself.

XX.

Twellerby

TIMES change, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe changes, gracefully, with them. Still, even for the most supple of womankind, a variation of surroundings must precede the change of her attitude towards things in general. The boldest of swimmers may gasp, for an instant, when he leaves safe and commonplace land, and plunges headlong into icy currents. So Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, to one who studies her with respectful admiration, as I do, is occasionally betrayed at the moment before she has adapted herself to a changed environment.

It is but a flash, the instant of time in which an acrobat shifts his centre of gravity. Then, from another, and presumably higher, rung of the social ladder, where we rise to higher things, not upon stepping-stones of our dead selves, but by gently shoving aside our former friends, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smiles serenely, and commences to cast confident glances upon still greater heights.

If, in the preceding brilliant figures of speech, I

have too rashly mixed divers, jugglers, and such-like, with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and if what I have to relate seems too small a matter for so long a

"PRESUMABLY HIGHER RUNG OF THE SOCIAL LADDER.

preamble, I can only plead in extenuation that everything that appertains to evolution interests a scientific observer. Also that, by dint of bending my neck and straining my eyes to watch Mrs. De la Rue Smythe on those greater heights, where I may not

follow her, I grow giddy, dazzled maybe, and maybe unable to see things in their right proportion.

We were not making great progress in our literary collaboration. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's hunger for "copy" seemed insatiable, but she coquetted with various and ever-changing dreams of achievements in Romance and Realism, and refused to put anything upon paper. So one afternoon I determined to protest more strongly against this shameful indifference to the pangs of a waiting world, and went to call upon her.

I am accused of being a dreamer, and perhaps I had been dreaming that afternoon as I went along. At any rate, when, after ringing, I found myself confronted by a footman in full livery—a stupendous creation in plum-coloured breeches—I was so doubtful of myself that, instead of asking airily for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I turned about and took my bearings, thinking that I had wandered to the wrong door—for the Smythes live in a square where liveries are almost as common as sparrows.

When I had convinced myself that I was not guilty of calling upon people who did not know me, I, of course, quickly recovered my *sang-froid*, and indeed was careful to hum lightly, as I studied the backs of the two well-shaped and stately legs which went up the stair before me. I acknowledge, too, that, when introduced to Mrs. De la Rue

Smythe's boudoir (I mean her "study") by this Master of Ceremonies, my greeting may have been jauntier than usual, because of his presence. But, when he left I collapsed. I felt that he was not a topic for conversation, but for the life of me I could think of nothing else; so I frowned painfully at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and while she touched upon a number of uninteresting subjects, I saw everything plum-colour.

"You have come, I suppose," she said at last, "to see what I have been doing toward your story." It had been first "ours," and sometimes even "mine," and I noted the change, but said nothing.

"The fact is," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with the surprised air of one who has just arrived unhelped at a new thing, "life is much more interesting, thrilling, I may say, than any book you and I can write."

"If you think so——" I said resignedly, shrugging my shoulders.

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe solemnly. "It is *awfully* exciting."

Just at that moment Smythe came in, and, after asking with the easiest air imaginable how the great work was getting on, suggested that he would like a cup of tea. So, presently, having made him promise that he would not stay after he had finished it, to which Smythe agreed with

wonderful readiness, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe rang, and while the plum-coloured vision prepared the little table near her, she continued:—

"PREPARED THE LITTLE TABLE."

"*Awfully* exciting," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe repeated. "You understand, of course, Dr. Tregenna, that I use the word 'awfully' in its true sense, and with no idea of vulgar colloquialism."

"Of course," I agreed, but my thoughts were elsewhere, and my eyes followed the movements of those fascinating plum-coloured breeches.

"What one feels is," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with delightful clearness, "that before accepting any publisher's offer, one would like to feel, not only that one has thoughts and visions of which the world should hear more, but also that one has so studied the subject, and considered the method of embodying it, that one can present something to the public which no one else could put forward, even in a less perfect form. To write for mere money must be a most degrading slavery. We must be thankful that, whatever responsibilities we inherit with worldly prosperity, it at least saves us from *that* temptation": and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, having made herself perfectly clear upon this point, though at some length, sat stately as the stateliest of the Muses, and thanked the plum-coloured vision with sweet dignity, as it respectfully murmured something in her ear.

"But," I protested meekly, "though it may be all very well for some people to take up that position, and, indeed, is perfectly right in those who are not poor, in my case, as you know"—but there I stopped. The plum-coloured breeches, which had not yet left the side of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, made the slightest of movements. It was

no greater than the motion with which a delicately-minded person might remind acquaintances of his presence, if he feared they were verging upon private affairs—and, as I have said, I stopped.

"This romantic and unpractical notion may be all very well for people to whom a few hundreds are nothing one way or the other," said Smythe a bit sharply (Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had not yet condescended to give him his tea); "but I would have you and Tregenna recollect that, as far as I am concerned, I shall be only too glad——"; then I saw his glance fall upon the plum-coloured spectre, and he stopped too.

"Not that one cares for money for its own sake, of course," he remarked presently; "but there are always useful purposes to which it can be put."

"Thank you, Twellerby," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, without seeming to have heard either of us, "that will do"; and Twellerby, in the flesh, haunted us no more.

We got our tea, and Smythe grumbled, uselessly, that the bread and butter was unsatisfactory to a hungry man, with three or four hours yet to wait for dinner. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, having, of course, assured herself that I wanted no more, declined to order more for him, and pointed out that, when he had finished, we would begin our labours.

"You might put some coal on the fire for me before you go," she suggested. As at that moment the plum-coloured Twellerby came in to take away the tea-tray, I thought that Smythe was about to give him the order. He made some movement, and looked in the sublime Twellerby's direction, but finally said nothing, and saw to the fire when that individual had left the room.

"Yes," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, returning to her former topic while Smythe was still occupied with the tongs, "to one who looks deeply into life and considers it carefully, the most commonplace existence is more thrilling than the most stirring romance."

"Yes," I said respectfully — but the plum-coloured Twellerby, a romance personified, still floated before my inner vision.

"It is true," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe proceeded to inform me, "that there are many apparently terrible things in life; but, as I said when I heard that the Goldies had lost their money only the other day, who can tell but what it will be the saving of them? A trust in Providence, Dr. Tregenna, and an eye for the Beautiful and the Romantic, makes one see Life in its brightest and yet its truest tints—which are *colour de rose*."

Now if Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had not told Smythe to attend to the fire, he would never have

meddled with it. If he had not picked up a lump of coal with the tongs, he could not possibly have dropped it clattering in the fender, and then things would not have gone as they did. For, when Smythe dropped the coal, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe stopped her flood of eloquence to put her hand as near as she could get to her brain, which she told him was racked by his awkwardness. When he had apologized—

"Where was I?" Mrs. Smythe asked me, and I replied hastily:

"You were saying," I told her, "that, to you, life is plum-coloured"; and I never noticed my mistake until Smythe's screams of laughter, and Mrs. Smythe's indignant eyes, brought me to my senses, and so take my breath away even now when I think of them, that I must interrupt my conversation, as indeed we did then.

XXI.

Confessions

SMYTHE had finished his tea — over which I feared he would choke—and had gone off, leaving me to bear myself as bravely as might be in the now somewhat icy atmosphere provided by Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

I found it difficult to appease her, owing, I firmly believe, to the fact that the stupendous Twellerby was looming so huge in her mind, that she supposed she had in some way betrayed her own weakness, and that I had wished to annoy her by noticing it.

This I was quite incapable of doing, and tried to let her see as much, even while dimly wondering why to be suspected of this particular rudeness was so repugnant to me, since I could not plead equally guiltless of other incivilities. I concluded, with a smothered groan, that I must be one of those who

> "Compound for sins they have a mind to
> By damning those they aren't inclined to,"

and redoubled my efforts to escape from the imputation of a sin which had not tempted me.

"After all," I said, with a forgiving air, "I can understand you two laughing at my tell-tale tongue. I must confess, whatever it may prove, that your man had my attention."

"He was favoured!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe icily. "But I have neither laughed, nor felt inclined to laugh"; and indeed, looking at her as she sat perfectly erect before me, I felt that I must be in desperate straits to suggest it. Laughter seemed as far from Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, just then, as roses from an iceberg, and any attempt to mollify her by any words of mine, appeared as stupid as if I had smiled upon Mont Blanc with the expectation of thawing it.

"Yet," I continued, with an injured air, ignoring her denial, "I make no pretence at being accustomed to luxury and refinement, Mrs. Smythe. I have never, so far as I know, tried to deceive you in such matters. If I clumsily show that I am unused to my surroundings when I come here, I allow it is a great mistake, perhaps even a social crime; but I did not think *you* would be the one to blame me for it. I fancied that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's mouth relaxed a little, but she said nothing, and so I rose, though I wanted another

cup of tea, and putting my cup on the little table at her side, I said good-bye.

"We will let the matter of collaboration wait, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe," I said, with all the dignity at my command, "until I have gained the polish necessary for admission to polite society."

I then bowed, and had my hand upon the door, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe called to me.

"Where are you going?" she asked with a less frigid air.

"To my rooms," I told her, turning the handle.

"But for polish?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Oh, I know I must go elsewhere for that," I admitted, "but I haven't thought where yet," and I opened the door.

"Supposing——" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and I stopped.

"You were saying——?"

"Supposing I forgave you, at least until you had decided where to go for what you want?"

"Where there has been no crime," I declared, opening the door still further, though I needed no more room to pass out, "where there has been no crime, there need be no forgiveness."

"I never argue," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told

me with dignity. "But you said 'social crime' yourself."

"Pardon me!" I retorted. "I never contradict a lady, but——"

"Why, how silly of me," declared Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, astonished at her discovery; "you haven't had your second cup of tea!" And as she at once rang for fresh tea to be made, and was all smiles before Twellerby could answer the bell, though he came while my hand still lingered on the door—why, I just turned back, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, on seeing me settled down once more, wondered audibly about what I had been so silly as to lose my temper.

"After all," she told me indulgently,—"two lumps?—you'll ruin your digestion, but you doctors are so careless of yourselves. Where was I? Oh! after all, if you have not seen Twellerby before, I daresay he amuses you."

"Of course I haven't seen him before," I protested. "He can't have been here long, surely!"

"Oh! I don't know, let me see," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. "No, of course he hasn't. How stupid of me. The day before yesterday, perhaps. Or was it yesterday morning? These household matters get driven out of one's head by other things, don't they?"

"I don't know that he amuses me, either," I decided.

"Well, shall we say frightens you a little, perhaps?" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe asked me, still indulgent, and indeed eyeing me a little closely

"'TWO LUMPS?'"

as she awaited my confession. But I refused to admit any such weakness.

"Why," I asked indignantly, "should it be supposed that a fellow is to frighten me simply because he puts on your livery? If it were war-paint and a tomahawk, now!"

"Yes, I know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe admitted; "and, of course, I was only laughing. I found time to choose the livery myself, so how *could* I be afraid of it; and I engaged *him*, so he has every reason to respect me—and, of course, he knows his place—still——"

"Still?" I said, becoming interested. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe can always interest me when she chooses to be confidential.

"Well, you know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, slowly, bending forward to examine the tea leaves in the bottom of her cup, "there's a sort of an *atmosphere* about him, don't you know."

"Oh! come," I retorted, "he hasn't one of his own, has he?"

"I don't know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe admitted; "Mackenzie (that's my maid) tells me that he is very reserved and most gentlemanly."

"He knows his work, I hope."

"I wish *I* did," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe desperately, throwing all reserve to the winds. "You see he was with the Hautboises as *Upper* Footman, and we intend only to keep one—*yet*."

"Oh!" I said, and had multiplied plum-coloured visions.

"Now, what his duties are," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe went on, with a mournful air, "I can't exactly tell. For instance, should I have asked

him to put on coals? It would be so easy to get coal dust upon his—er——"

"Hands," I said promptly. "But what does Smythe say?"

"Oh, *he* doesn't know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe explained despairingly. "He tells me to tell Twellerby whenever I want anything done. Why, he might give notice at once—and besides, one would look so ignorant!"

"It wouldn't do, just to ask the man himself for information, I suppose?" I suggested dubiously.

"Heavens!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, sinking back in her chair with horror at the notion.

"Well, perhaps it wouldn't," I admitted; "and I confess that I know absolutely nothing about these matters. I expect to keep a White Elephant, or a—a *Rainbow* as quickly as I shall a footman."

"I must ask some people I know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe decided; "I think I can find out from them without saying too much."

"In any case," I urged, "the man looks inoffensive though very large. I expect he has no notion that he is making any stir."

"I don't know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe allowed dubiously. "He has such ways, you know! Now, yesterday, I spoke to him suddenly, and he called me 'My Lady.' Now, what did he *mean?*"

"He didn't know what he was saying, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe," I suggested. "I often answer you stupidly myself."

"Yes, you certainly do," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe agreed, and her tone nettled me.

"After all," I said, rising once more—for collaboration was a useless dream that day—"this dread of a livery is an exploded affair, a mere fiction, handed down from the Dark Ages. This is the latter end of the Nineteenth Century, the Victorian Era (not to mention Jubilee) when every man can claim equality with his domestics, and has a right to it."

"Now you're getting silly again," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with that frankness which is one of her many charms. "You had better go."

So I went, and noticed, as I passed out on to the stairs, that she, after an instant's hesitation, rang the bell.

This was obviously for Twellerby to let me out, and, forewarned, I prepared to meet him boldly.

In the hall he came forward with my overcoat—huge, deferential, inscrutable, plum-coloured.

Taking the coat I thanked him, and looked him steadily, unflinchingly between the eyes.

"'The Man's the Gowd,'" I declared argumentatively.

"Beg pardon, m'lord!" said Twellerby, and I quailed and went.

It has since occurred to me that some men may have striven for success, that they may be the better able to meet their friends' footmen unappalled.

I wonder when I can face Twellerby again.

"'MUSIC,' SAID MRS. DE LA RUE SMYTHE, 'IS DIVINE.'"—*p.* 181.

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XXII.

Science ?

"MUSIC," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "is divine."

"I have heard so," I admitted; "but one is always glad to have another carefully considered opinion."

"Oh, I am convinced of it," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me. "Its moral influence is remarkable."

"I have noticed," I agreed, "that in fiction, which I understand is the looking-glass held up to Nature, the morality, say of a *primo tenore*, always is remarkable. He ranks, in that respect, with the baronet."

"I never look at the choir-boys in what 's-his-name's picture," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, after considering me for a moment, "but what I feel myself a better woman."

"A delightful method of attaining righteousness," I agreed. "I myself have watched choir-boys often."

"One cannot help being impressed by those white-robed little figures."

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"Oh, certainly I do! so far as I am competent," I told her; and felt it was perhaps as well that certain words in our language are used so ambiguously.

This little interchange of courtesies put Mrs. De la Rue Smythe in excellent humour with herself, and with the world.

"One feels that these accomplishments are trivial," she allowed; "but still, if one can entertain——" And again I was able to assure her, heartily, that I was certain she did so.

"Now, which of my songs do you think I sing best?" she demanded; and I was trying to answer with due regard for truth, when our host kindly rescued me.

He wished to introduce a lion in the shape of an arctic traveller, and I stood aside while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe beamed upon the happy scientist, and, if I knew her mind, wondered what to say to him.

"Eighty-six degrees North, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe! Think of that!" said our host admiringly, and perhaps to give her a friendly lead.

"Oh! how delightful! was it cold?"

I left the great man allowing, with a somewhat weary smile, that it had been cold at times, and when I came back he had been carried off to another part of the room, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was ready to sing his praises.

"Such a nice man!" she told me, "and not a bit rough, though they do say he never washed for ever so long. And I 'm to have a great bearskin for my boudoir!"

"Good heavens!" I said. "You 're in luck. He can't have many left if he offers them to all the ladies he meets."

"Perhaps he doesn't," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe calmly; "and perhaps they don't all get an opportunity of asking for one."

"You didn't——!" I began; but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, nodding her head with decision, interrupted me.

"Oh, but I did!" she announced. "What could he do with them all? Someone must have them, and why shouldn't I take one? It will look lovely before the fire. I asked him to tea."

"A fair exchange!" I told her. "Is he coming?"

"He 'd like to," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me; "but he can't. He has some stupid engagement for a lecture to-morrow, to some silly Geographical or Geological fogies, and then he goes to the other end of the world almost. I 'm sorry, for he 's a most interesting man to talk to—we have so many tastes in common."

I was considerably staggered. I admit that. Still, I have, more than once before, met with people who were, to say the least of it, not brilliant

"'WAS IT COLD?'"—*p.* 185.

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upon ninety-nine topics, but amazingly interesting and instructive if one chanced upon the hundredth. "Here," I told myself, "is a case in point. How much oftener will you require this lesson? She needed a better man than you to bring her out—and that's all."

"You are interested in some of his hobbies?" I asked respectfully.

"Oh, of course!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with a certain amount of modest pride.

"You see he said something about Evolution, and then stopped short, saying that he supposed I didn't care much for that sort of thing."

"What did you say to that?" I asked. I confess that I had never thought of touching upon Evolution, with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Oh, of course, I told him that I knew all about it," Mrs. Smythe declared with dignity. "All about tadpoles, how they grow into toads and things, and may even be monkeys—ages upon ages later, of course—if they're taken early enough. I think it one of the most wonderful things in the world."

"And what did he say?" I asked, when I had recovered my breath.

"Oh, he said it was most wonderful, and was asking me what books I had read upon the subject, when some stupid men came to be introduced, and they took him away."

I was near the great man late that night in the smoking-room, when there were only half-a-dozen others left.

Our host mentioned bearskins, and the great man referred to the price.

"How on earth did you get to know that?" our host asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth and staring a little. "Have you any to sell? If so, I should think you could get your own price for them."

But the great man, after a glance round the circle, shook his head sadly.

"I never thought of selling any," he told us, "but I have had to buy several!"—and I thought of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's boudoir.

XXIII.

Past and Present

"HEIGHO! Let us be lackadaisical, lachrymose, sentimental—perhaps maudlin, to-night."

Use what contemptuous word one may, to express my silly state of mind, I will neither contradict it nor care to make the attempt. I called on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe again to-day, and for once, at least, am haunted by the trouble of another—and haunted the more vilely, perhaps, because that trouble is petty, common, and inevitable.

When Twellerby showed me into the "study"—now decorated, by the way, with a fine yellow-white bearskin—Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was busily engaged with a pile of letters, and I expressed a fear lest I had called at an inconvenient time.

"If you are wanting to catch the post——" I said; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe laughed musically, but without any of that *abandon* shown by the less cultured.

"My dear Doctor, these letters were answered years ago!" And hard upon the heels of the laugh came a little sigh.

"Then I am not interrupting?" I asked, looking about me at the same time for some safe place where my hat would not be crushed, as it was only a week ago, by some short-sighted female. I value Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's teachings very highly, but I fear that until collaboration has flourished more exceedingly, I cannot place a hat against an interview and cry quits!

"On the contrary," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me, when I had settled down; "I was hoping to see you when I began turning over these papers."

I was flattered, and said so, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe sighed again.

"You have never been in Love, Dr. Tregenna?"

"Never!" I declared stoutly, and mentally beseeched the Recording Angel to make no entry until I had time to explain.

"What, never?" demanded Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with greater severity.

"I delight in Gilbert and Sullivan," I replied, "and the *Quarterly* may be quite right for anything I know. But I abhor quotation. 'Never' is my answer still." And again I ventured an inaudible appeal to the Recording Angel, who, I

feared, might be on the point of making a double entry.

"Well," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after considering me carefully, and, I fancy, trying to follow my erudite allusion to the *Quarterly*, "there are men, I know, who will never confess to it, unless they can say it was returned."

"Faith!" I retorted, "some men of my acquaintance would make no difficulty about swearing to that part of the affair." But I was relieved when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe ceased to be inquisitorial, and turned to the papers beside her.

"Here," she informed me, "are the letters of a silly boy, who once thought he had an affection for a silly girl."

"Poor fellow!" I said; "I hope he got over it, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe."

"I hope so, too," agreed Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, but not with the air of one who had any great faith in the likelihood of so desirable a conclusion. Her manner, indeed, was so peculiar that I became suspicious—which, perhaps, would have happened sooner with anyone less guileless than myself.

"Would it be indiscreet to ask if I know the boy?"

"I don't think you do," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Or the girl?"

"Not as she was then," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with an air of ingenuous hesitation; and then there was silence.

"You were kind enough," I reminded her presently, "to say that you were wishing to see me."

"Yes," and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe once more laid her finger upon some of the papers before her.

They were loose in two heaps, and near them lay a couple of narrow ribbons. My chair was not far from Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's desk, upon which they were spread, and, as my glance followed her finger, I saw the writing of the heap near to me was her own—unformed perhaps, but still her own.

Having seen that much, I carefully avoided looking at the other heap.

It was one of those silly inconsistencies, those absurd sentimentalities which occasionally hold one.

I had asked, though carelessly enough, whether I knew this "silly boy." Now, though I could scarcely know the writing, since I was told I did not know the scribe, I turned my eyes away.

"We agreed the other day," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe reminded me, picking up a letter from the further heap, "that to create anything that is to live, we must study Life."

"I remember your saying so," I allowed.

"Here is Life!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe solemnly, and waved one letter between her right finger and thumb, while with her other hand she tapped upon the pile.

"Let us study it, then," I observed; and, reaching out, picked up the letter nearest me, which, by the way, was in her handwriting; curiously blotted, as though in some earlier stage of its existence it had been through a shower.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe gave a gasp, and, quite forgetting her usual leisurely manner, made a dash which it would have been difficult for me to avoid had I wished to do so. I contented myself, however, with a dignified protest, and surrendered my prize.

It was then that the little affair occurred which sticks in my memory, and will stick when many more important things have gone adrift on the seas of forgetfulness.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was pleased at having so successfully passed her quite imaginary danger, and was inclined to be gracious. She hunted among the papers and handed me something.

"You can see that instead, if you like," she told me; "only you mustn't look at the back of it."

"That" was a photograph, considerably faded, and broken at the corners. It was of Mrs. De la

Rue Smythe herself, perhaps fifteen years ago, and was charming.

"You recognize it?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Undoubtedly," I told her; and looked from the photo to the living face, and back again.

"You will see a great difference," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with an air which belied her words.

"The young lady here," I said, touching the photo gently, for it was a pretty face, with that air of simplicity which does not always last—"the young lady here could scarcely be expected to have acquired the air of *savoir faire*, if I may say so, or the repose."

At this Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smiled serenely. She had risen to hand me the photograph; she turned toward the full-length mirror near her, with a sidelong glance before seating herself, and at that moment of all moments the setting sun chose to blaze into the room.

As Mrs. De la Rue Smythe eyed her reflection approvingly, and as I now looked from the photo to the reflection, wondering within myself when and how a certain suggestion of hardness had crept in, a sunbeam drove full upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's head, and found the first white hair and a crow's-foot.

There they were, and there we both saw them. The lines spread, faint as yet but unmistakable, from the outer angle of the eye that gazed askance at their reflection. The white hair ran, long and wavy, in and out between its darker fellows, and showed the clearer for them; and looking, fascinated, from one to the other of these pioneers, I caught Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's eye on mine, and knew that she knew.

A trifle? Oh, certainly, and one of the most trifling imaginable. But that white hair strangled conversation almost as swiftly as if it had been a bowstring.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe presently discovered, with a forced little laugh, that looking over those foolish letters had made her head ache; and I, laughing too and trying hard to find a passable joke under cover of which I might retreat, bowed myself out. I had not set foot upon the stair before I discovered that, in my haste, I had left a glove, and, turning precipitately because I was strangely flurried, I opened the door.

I might have known better!

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was at the mirror once more, turning this way and that, with a haste, a nervousness, that showed itself in every line of her figure. Her face I could not see, and I did not give it any chance of turning to me. I left

the door unshut, for fear of the noise, and came softly away.

I shall never see that particular white hair again; perchance even crows'-feet may be kept at bay for a while, by delicate manipulation and long hours of sleep—together with a careful watch against laughter and tears. But they have come, and if I mistake not, will haunt Mrs. De la Rue Smythe for evermore. Which strikes me as tragic.

For Pity's Sake

"'THE greatest of these is charity,'" said Mrs. de la Rue Smythe, and I quite agreed with her.

"Precisely for that reason," I insisted, "you will, I am sure, think twice before you drive me away this afternoon. Was it not at your urgent request that I came? Am I to have faced the weather, and Twellerby, for nothing?"

"There is time for tea," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "but for no real work. I have an appointment in twenty minutes. Kindly ring the bell!"

So I rang, and wondered how we could most profitably use the twenty minutes—in addition to having tea.

Now I don't know how it may be with other people, but I hate to be hurried. Who could think of, and properly consider or discuss, anything reasonable, in twenty minutes? I was so

disgusted and flurried that I almost said something about the weather!—a topic I pride myself upon always avoiding.

"If this is a deserving object which is to occupy you," I suggested at last, "my afternoon is already spoilt. I may as well stay and help you."

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe declined my services.

"There are a great many impostors about," I warned her, "and a kind-hearted woman is easily deceived."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly!" I told her. "Now only this morning I was called in to see a child that had bronchitis. At least the woman who called herself the mother said so. I found no trace of it; but then, as she pointed out, I was too young to know everything."

"It is no one with bronchitis," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe declared.

"Of course not," I agreed. "But then the father (*soi-disant*) swears that if only he had one sovereign, or even nineteen shillings and sixpence, he could get out of this atmosphere to a place in the country, where the child always gets well at once. He wrote to let me know that, this afternoon."

"It is no one who wants nineteen shillings and

sixpence—at least not in that way. It's a poor girl."

"Oh," I said nodding; "I know——"

"No you don't," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured me. "Do you ever read *Flitters and Furbelows?*"

"'Written by the Upper Ten, for the Upper Ten,'" I quoted. "I know it."

"Well," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe explained, "a poor girl who is on their staff, is coming to see some new dresses of mine, that I shall be wearing next week."

"Oh! Where does the charity come in?"

"Work for the unemployed," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shortly. "She'll get paid for describing them."

I understood, or thought I did, and apologized.

"I agree with you, Mrs. Smythe. I'm not likely to be useful in such an interview. Unless, indeed, you think the young lady would like to report upon me, too?"

"Men's dress is not described by Society papers," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe reminded me.

"Thank heaven!" I declared, but at the same time could not help feeling uneasy. One or two places in my coat shone, I was aware, in a manner that would have better befitted my boots. I had a somewhat better coat at home, which I usually wore when worshipping at the Shrine of Wisdom

and in the presence of her high-priestess, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. But my summons had been imperative, I had not given myself time to go home and adorn; and yet I felt that probably all this could not be explained to the eagle-eyed young person who might swoop in upon us at any moment, and make "copy" of me just to fill up.

I hinted as much to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and rose to go, but she treated the idea with scorn.

"Are you known, either to this girl or to anyone else?"

"No," I acknowledged, "I am not widely celebrated, but, if this be an ordinary interview, the young lady will probably make an inventory of the chairs and other furniture. Were she to see me about——"

This is *not* an ordinary interview," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe insisted emphatically. "But, as I told you before, one doesn't like to deprive a poor girl of her chance to honestly earn a few shillings."

"Heaven forbid!" I protested. "If it were not for my fear of her, I should still beg you to also give me a chance of learning how that can be done. But——" and I held out my hand again.

"Wait just a moment though!"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had recollected, or was trying to recollect something, and applied a finger-

tip to a possibly thoughtful, but certainly unfurrowed brow.

"Where did I put them? In my bureau? No! They must be downstairs. Wait a minute, please!" And, jingling a bunch of keys, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe left the room.

Whatever she went to fetch was evidently hard to find. Five minutes passed before the door opened, and then it showed, not Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, but Twellerby.

"Miss ——," he announced, and then, not seeing his mistress, stood apparently somewhat taken aback, and looking at me for an explanation.

I rose to the occasion at once, and forgot all about my coat.

"Mrs. De la Rue Smythe will be here again in a moment," I told him. "You need not trouble to tell her. I will entertain the lady until Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is disengaged."

Whereupon Twellerby bowed himself out, and I addressed the curious figure which he had introduced. Have you ever watched a ferret, just dropped at the mouth of a burrow, peering and nosing around before it sneaks its way in? May I be forgiven if the thought was unjust! But it was of that unpleasant animal I was reminded, as I moved and handed a chair to the visitor, who, being apparently short-sighted, and having allowed

her pince-nez to drop from her nose, now stood fumbling for it and replacing it, while she blinked a weak pair of eyes and thrust a sharp nose forward, as if to pick up the scent.

Now, past sad experiences with my hat had taught me wisdom in regard to it. I had put it out of the way, and indeed out of sight. My gloves were in it, since I was prepared for taking notes with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. Also, at the same moment when Twellerby opened the door, I was standing in my favourite attitude with my coat-tails to the fire. I daresay I looked pretty much at home. I daresay my coat seemed unfit to be worn anywhere but in my own rooms. It is certain that Miss —— did me the honour of supposing that she saw the master of the house. I gave her a chair. I gave her tea. I begged her to make herself comfortable, and assured her that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe could not possibly keep her waiting very long; and before I had finished I saw her hand steal to her pocket, and knew from the way the sharp nose lifted itself, that I was marked down as fair game.

XXV.

A Chapter of Revelations

SO this was the "poor girl"!

Mrs. Smythe is not, as a rule, given to under-estimate the years of her female acquaintances, and I was suspicious of her motive at once.

Instead of the interesting, possibly anæmic damsel, young, timid, and refined, whom I had perhaps hoped to see, and of whom I doubt not there are many working for *Flitters and Furbelows*, here was a woman older than myself, of an intensely business-like air, very far removed from timidity, and with a strongly-marked cockney accent.

Why "girl"?

This lady obviously had the (doubtful) advantage of me in age, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe never, even in her most playful moments, dreams of calling me Boy. The "poor" might

equally be due to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's imagination.

At the thought of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's possible intent to deceive, I grew indignant, determined not to countenance success gained by such means, and was so concerned that, when Miss —— said, "Mr. De la Rue Smythe, I presume?" I quite forgot to deny the imputation, and merely asked whether she would like more cream.

The hand that I imagined was clutching a note-book was still hidden.

The weak eyes blinked and shifted a little behind the glasses.

"What is this?" I wondered. "The lady is disconcerted. I have it! She never expected to meet Smythe, and doesn't know how far he has been informed of her errand."

"You are no doubt the young lady from *Flitters and Furbelows?*" I suggested; and relief and satisfaction were plainly to be seen behind the *pince-nez.*

"I represent that Journal," Miss —— acknowledged; and now, while the eyes seemed focussed on the shiniest area visible in my coat-sleeve, the note-book was produced.

"Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me that she had promised to show you some dresses."

"It was so good of her—and of you not to object."

"Oh, I never dreamt of doing so," I assured her; "I never interfere in these matters."

"Some gentlemen are not so kind"; and, as she spoke, Miss —— made a note of the bear-skin.

This lady was evidently accustomed to despatch. By dint of using her left hand for her cup while she made jottings with her right, she had already finished her tea.

"Another cup!" I suggested, and when she refused, I, after a moment's hesitation, produced my cigarette case and offered it to her. I know that to be the correct thing, judging from the published interviews I have seen, and I was anxious that the rites of hospitality should not be maimed in Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's absence. A cigarette was accepted after some slight hesitation, and my visitor, with a glance at me, made another note; while I, beginning to feel my nervousness wear off, wondered whether I could relieve Mrs. De la Rue Smythe of the whole interview.

"You have your Kodak, of course?" I suggested, and behold! at the word an innocent-looking thing like an opera-glass appeared.

Exactly what I had read! If only Mrs. De la Rue Smythe would take another ten minutes to find

whatever she had gone to fetch, we would have the most charming photos.

"What views will you take?" I asked anxiously, for my companion was peering about in a dissatisfied way.

"If you will take those two easy chairs and that small table over there," she told me, jerking her pencil toward an already overcrowded corner, "I think that will do for one. We can shift them again and take them at a different angle."

I shifted them, not caring to call in Twellerby's assistance, and was moving out of what I supposed to be the field, when I was requested to stop.

"I want a figure in the foreground."

"Pardon me!" I told her, retiring at the double; "a constitutional nervousness!" and although I saw that the lady had one or two sporting shots at me, I can guarantee that they will not develop.

I shifted the bearskin, and most of the furniture, to most of the corners before this conscientious worker was satisfied.

I then became convinced that we must soon be interrupted, and announced my determination of looking for Mrs. De la Rue Smythe myself.

"I hope you will like the dresses," I said; "I shall look forward with pleasure to seeing your report of our pleasant interview."

To this polite little speech, which had the merit of absolute sincerity, my visitor replied that perhaps I would prefer for her to "arrange" with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Certainly, certainly!" I decided. "But I understood that all arrangements had been made?"

"Not at all!" and producing a memorandum from the pocket of her note-book, this business-like person proceeded to instruct me.

"The dresses," she said, "will be mentioned once each for a quarter's subscription to our Journal, which, as no doubt you know, is read in all the best houses."

"I have heard so," I acknowledged, and begged for further information.

"For a half-year's subscription," pursued this eminently practical lady, "each dress will receive a few words of carefully considered praise."

"Excellent!" I declared. "And for a year's subscription?"

"For a year's subscription," continued this genius, imperturbably, "Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's personal appearance will be favourably spoken of. May I say a year?"

"I leave it entirely to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe," I protested; "but I am almost sure that she will say a year. That I suppose is as far as you go?"

"Oh, no! we believe that there may be one or two social functions to which we could not gain admission without, oh! a certain amount of trouble, you know."

"Really!" I protested. "How thin-skinned and stupid some people are!"

"Oh, very! But we were thinking that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe might be at some of these."

"Oh, I dare say," I allowed.

"If she would do us the favour of acting for us on these occasions," said the chronicler of beauty and fashion, "she can, of course, mention her own appearance in whatever terms she chooses, and shall have twenty copies of that week's issue."

"You must arrange with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe," I said hurriedly, for I fancied that I heard the front door. "She will be with you presently. Pray take another cigarette in the meantime. And, by-the-by, since perhaps she intended this interview to be a surprise for me (I only knew of the dresses), you had better say nothing of our conversation. Now I think of it, you have not mentioned the terms for the interview."

"According to the space we give," I was told.

"I must leave it entirely to Mrs. Smythe," I repeated, and, pleading that I was almost too late for an appointment, I picked up my hat and bolted.

I met Mrs. De la Rue Smythe upon the stair, and was informed that she could not find the note she had been searching for, and that she had been detained by two fellow-members of a committee.

"You will find your 'poor girl' upstairs," I told her; "but I fear you will think her aged considerably. She has waited some time"; and I hurried away.

XXVI.

For the Benefit of Posterity

HEN next I called, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was in a condition of profound melancholy. So profound, that I could imagine nothing which would account for it, save the death of another Duke.

That, however, shows merely that I am not always just to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe—the cause of her trouble being something very different.

Seating myself, and feeling my face settle into a fit expression of gloom, in sympathy with hers, I waited respectfully for her confidence.

"I don't know," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "what to do!"

"Time the Healer," I suggested.

"Time the Destroyer!" cried Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Both," I agreed.

"There are some things that Time cannot reproduce."

"History repeats itself," I murmured; feeling not quite so sure, now, of my ground.

"Don't be silly!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe entreated me. "History won't repeat *our* work!"

Frankly, I didn't suppose that History would take much notice of it. Still, one cannot justly appreciate intellectual efforts until they are complete, much less before they are fairly started.

"I am afraid you may be right," I told her. "But what has made you think of that just now?"

"Listen!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me; and with appropriate gesture and emphasis she read as follows:

"It is the opinion of experts that, owing to the inferior quality of the paper now used for books, a hundred years is the maximum of life possible for any one of those at present being produced. By the end of the twentieth century, it is declared that the books now pouring into the British Museum, will be represented by nothing more than handfuls of leaves, falling into dust at the touch of even the most reverent hands!"

When Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had finished this startling piece of information, she put down the magazine from which she had been reading.

"There!" she said tragically; and I, not as yet seeing the importance of this discovery to ourselves,

murmured, "Dear me!" and was sorry to notice how colourless and unsympathetic my exclamation sounded. I tried to better this by expanding my chest well, and then shouting, "Good Heavens!"

"Do you realize what this means?" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe begged me to consider. "Do you see the pathos of it all?"

I could only rack my brains in vain, murmur "Pathos!" and shake my head like any drunken owl!

"Do you not see?"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's voice rose sharply, as she sounded the depths of my dulness.

"A hundred years," she repeated, "and one's words may be all utterly forgotten!"

I was on the point of asking what else she would expect, but a glance at her made me think it wiser to sing another tune.

"Merely the earlier editions," I suggested.

"But if they do not sell?"

"Oh! you think that possible?"

"Are we writing for the herd?" asked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, stamping.

"Heaven only knows!" I admitted. As a matter of fact I, at any rate, had written nothing.

"It might be a hundred years before we were understood," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe pointed out.

"Quite possibly," I admitted, shrugging my shoulders.

"And by that time——"

"True," I agreed. It did seem a pity, as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had, obviously, something superb to deliver. "If you could compress it?" I suggested. "Then the expense of some more enduring form might be possible. Papyrus! Parchment! Even marble or bronze, if you could mould it into a sonnet!"

But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe only pouted. Do what I would, I could not help feeling uncertain as to the need for this tragic view of our prospects of immortality, and perhaps Mrs. De la Rue Smythe saw this. I am unimaginative, and so could neither be sure of our own claim to longer than a century of celebrity—nor could I even picture to myself the advantage of it.

I ventured at last to suggest as much, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe turned from me with a languid scorn, which was more like her usual manner than was the irritation of a moment before.

"You prefer present payment?" she asked.

"Certainly," I declared, and wondered at my own temerity.

"Well, I *must* say," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe coldly, "that I hate a mercenary disposition."

(I have noticed, often, that the things which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe feels she *must* say, are generally the most disagreeable to hear.)

"My sordid nature," I told her as I rose, "is at length laid bare. I don't know anything about Posterity. I am not likely to be in a position to know anything about it—or to care. Rather than be paid respect by Posterity I would be glad to take a small lump sum from a living publisher."

"Well, I *must* say——" repeated Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Pardon me!" I interrupted. "Are you sure you must?" and, with a bow, left Mrs. De la Rue Smythe aghast.

In the hall stood the impenetrable but ornamental Twellerby, with my overcoat ready.

"Tell me, Twellerby," I asked him as I struggled into it, and in my excitement mistook the inside pocket for an armhole—"Tell me, are you for immortal fame—or a fiver?"

"A fiver, if you please, sir," said Twellerby, unbending visibly.

"So am I," I told him heartily, and came away.

On consideration, and recollection of his face as I passed out, I fear that the too sanguine Twellerby expected cash down.

It is my constant misfortune to see at least two sides to most things.

It quickly struck me that a question is not of necessity finally settled because Twellerby and I chance to agree upon it. That much I grant you —still, as I have already declared, I know nothing of Posterity, and have a Briton's prejudice against strangers.

XXVII.

Intuition !

"IF such people only knew how they betray themselves by these pretensions," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe with sorrowful dignity, "they would be more careful."

I listened respectfully, but had no apposite remark to offer, feeling indeed that—as happens more and more frequently with the march of time—Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was discoursing upon subjects which I was not competent to discuss. She had been out the night before—Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's multifarious duties force her more and more into Society, and she usually has been out the night before. On this particular occasion she had met two ladies—"women," she said, who were not prepared to show Mrs. De la Rue Smythe that consideration which she expects. Judging from what she condescended to tell me,

I being the only available audience, these "women" must have made a rash attempt at snubbing Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"It is true," she acknowledged, "that they are the daughters of a peer *now*. But what *were* they?"

Being very ignorant in such matters, I shook my head, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, after delaying a moment to impress upon me the necessity of knowing my Burke, proceeded to explain.

"Their father," she told me, "was just a trader in the South Seas. One of those awful people that wicked Mr. Becke writes about. *Five* lives between him and the peerage only five years ago. And no education! And I was quite ready to be pleasant to them. But there! The savage showed itself, you know; and, as I said to the boy who took me down to supper (a *nice* boy, and very well-connected), why, when you have the Savage and the *Parvenue* together, what *can* you expect?"

"What, indeed!" I wondered. "What did the nice boy think?"

"Oh, he's very young, you know, and he didn't like to say much about it, because they happened to be near us. However, they heard what I said, and I hope it will do them good. It is surprising, really, how quickly these people show what they are. Don't you think so?"

"I go out so little," I pleaded; "if I heard their titles, and then found that they didn't drop many h's, or put knives in their mouths, I expect I should think them all right. I'd pass even those little difficulties if the title were foreign."

"Oh, of course!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe agreed. "I met a Russian Princess at Monte Carlo two years ago, who used her knife at table in the sweetest way. You should have seen her with peas! But you could tell she was an aristocrat to the tips of her nails. There's a——"

"*Je ne sais quoi*," I suggested.

"Precisely. One can never make a mistake. As I say to my husband, who has no intuition, you know, and sometimes wonders what people, that he has to meet, really are; I say, 'bring us together where I can watch them and hear them talk for a quarter of an hour. *I'll* tell you what they are.'."

I sat and looked at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe in mute admiration. I find it so difficult to class people, and I used to think it so easy.

I should have tried to get further information, and to profit by her experience, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe insisted that a faculty of that kind could not be explained, and that it was high time to get to work.

"I've had an Idea," she told me, and I at

once agreed that in that case everything else must be put aside.

Presently she remembered that the Idea, jotted down roughly for a friend's inspection and criticism, had gone across the square, and had not come back. So Twellerby was despatched to enquire for it, and to promise that, if not quite done with, it should return to the critic.

"I shouldn't much care to show things before they were pretty well worked out," I admitted, admiring Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's generous trustfulness; "I should think they might be judged unfairly."

But Mrs. Smythe assured me that there was no risk.

"I knew it would please her to say she had seen it," she told me, "though at the same time I 'm afraid it may make her cross, because she tries to write, herself, and can't. I don't know how it is, but some people seem never to know their own limits. But she has a perfect jewel of a cook, and since I lent her these notes, which she won't make head or tail of, of course she couldn't refuse me two recipes."

I was still considering Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's strategic ability, when a lady caller was announced. What the name was I could not hear, for Twellerby, who announces visitors in a way that

must make them think more of their names than ever they did before, was still across the square, and perhaps it was a housemaid who opened the door.

The lady, who was small and young, with a pleasant colour and nice eyes, met Mrs. De la Rue

"SHE HAD CALLED, SHE SAID, FOR A SUBSCRIPTION."

Smythe's critical inspection with a little blush, and plunged into her errand with a haste that showed some nervousness. She had called, she said, for a subscription list left two days before, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's face grew beautifully blank. The list was probably still in the servants' hands, she remarked, for she had not seen it. She also

said severely that they had orders not to take in things of that kind at the door.

"It will probably be the mistake of the girl who, I suppose, opened the door to you now," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe concluded; and then sat silent, with the air of a royal personage who had granted an audience of which she now wished to intimate the conclusion.

The visitor was evidently impressed, and even as uncomfortable as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe could wish. She half rose.

"If I might have my list——"

And Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with the air of one whose patience is almost exhausted, asked me to ring.

"Certainly," she agreed, "if it can be found. I must decline to hold myself responsible, however, for the safety of any papers which I have not seen"; and the visitor was overwhelmed with apologetic confusion.

On the appearance of Twellerby, who had secured the notes of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's happy thought, he was despatched to make enquiries. The silence then became so painful that, upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe pouring out another cup of tea for herself, I became confused, and rose to hand it to the visitor, which, at any rate, created a diversion.

"Promiscuous alms-giving," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe after, almost perforce, pouring out another cup for the intruder, "is a mistake which, in my opinion, should not be encouraged. I know that one runs the risk of seeming heartless to strangers. But, where a principle is involved, one must submit to be misunderstood."

To this the little pleasant-faced woman agreed readily, and said she was sure that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe must have many calls upon her purse.

"Yes," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe assured her; "so many, that I feel bound to give only to those of which I know the real usefulness——"

"But surely, in this case——" But Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had not finished.

"Besides being personally acquainted with those who are supporting the scheme," she added;—and the visitor was once more overwhelmed, and, glancing anxiously at the door for the still-absent Twellerby, murmured that she regretted not being able to claim that pleasure.

At this moment Twellerby came, and, at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's order, delivered the recovered list into the hands of its owner, He did so with his usual stately impassiveness, which was not shaken even by what followed.

The little lady had bidden a somewhat stately farewell to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and was

turning towards the door, when that wretched subscription list dropped and lay open. She had picked it up before either Twellerby or I could reach it, and then stood staring alternately at the last page, and the now somewhat abashed figure before her.

"Why, it's Twellerby!" she declared delightedly. "How good of you! And to think that I never recognized you!" And then and there this "remarkable creature," as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe called her afterwards, insisted upon shaking the reluctant Twellerby's hand.

She never apologized, either, but merely explaining that they were old friends, she left the room, and, in our own paralyzed silence, as we stared dumbly at one another, we could hear her voice run on unceasingly, as Twellerby escorted her down the stair.

"Well!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe; and sat listening in indignant silence until we heard the front door close.

"Kindly ring!"

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's feelings were at that moment too deep for superfluous words, and she said nothing more until the entrance of Twellerby, now scarcely able to suppress his excitement.

"You have met that, er—lady before, Twellerby?"

"Yes, madam. She nursed me two nights when I was ill at Hautbois, madam."

"Oh! a professional nurse."

"The Lady Mary Hautbois, madam. A cousin to the Hautboises of Hautbois."

There was a moment's silence, while Twellerby lingered, and then he spoke again.

"I would like to say, madam, that when I put down my name for a small sum in the Lady Mary's book, which seemed only right, I didn't think she would look at it now."

"I am glad you are grateful, Twellerby. I myself intend sending my subscription to-night"; and then Twellerby left, and the silence once more grew oppressive.

"I wish I had feminine intuition," I said at last. "It must be invaluable!"

XXVIII.

The Colonel

IT is an unfortunate fact that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is drawing in advance, largely, upon the vast amount of popularity and admiration which will no doubt be hers, when she and I have ventured together, hand in hand one may say, into print.

She acknowledged to me that, under the strictest pledge of secrecy, of course, she had hinted at the possibility of a literary surprise, to one or two of her most intimate friends.

I cannot say whether Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's confidence in the discretion of her friends is as complete as it seems—or whether she regarded a pledge of secrecy as the cheapest method of ensuring a wide advertisement. All I can say is, that, either her friends must since have been extraordinarily active in their social duties, or Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is blessed with a greater number of intimate friends than anyone else whom I know; for, go where I will, I meet with enquiries, inquisitive or kind, concerning our progress.

Opinions on our probable subject are very interesting, and widely different.

I have heard a New Religion suggested—also a New Cookery Book; the latter, I venture with all diffidence to suppose, because I am known to be so constantly in hot water with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

This may not seem a sufficient reason, but I can think of no better.

One old lady persists in begging me to say why Mrs. De la Rue Smythe chose me to help her. When I confess that I don't know, she always retorts, "No more do I," and examines me afresh, with eye-glasses raised to a pair of gimlet-eyes, as though hoping that a close survey may reveal something of intelligence in my face, which has hitherto escaped her.

I have also been introduced to strangers, by well-intentioned friends, as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's collaborateur.

I have also been called her assistant; and the girl, a very pleasant girl, to whom this was said, translated "Assistant" into "Secretary" two minutes later, and was quite unnecessarily dismayed when someone else corrected her—which I had not thought it needful to do.

It was upon that same evening, while the unfortunate damsel was still hunting through her

possibly somewhat limited vocabulary in search of fresh words wherewith to scourge herself (saying she was awfully sorry, awfully glad, and awfully interested), that I first set eyes upon the Colonel. He was standing at the opposite side of the room, a quiet, inconspicuous, middle-aged man, whom I should not have noticed in the crowd, had I not found that he was watching me.

Later I met him in the supper-room, where he was gravely waiting upon two ladies—perhaps the oldest and the youngest there. I noticed that they both seemed equally at their ease with him, and that the younger one, just out, sent him hither and thither for jelly, trifle, and sweetmeats, as readily as she would have sent a boy. Here again I saw him looking at me, and I wondered whether I had ever met him before; but, if he thought of speaking, his two charges were too exacting to allow any wandering from their side, and it was not until I had said good-night to my hostess that he introduced himself.

It was raining hard then, and as I stood peering out into the dripping streets, debating whether or not I should afford myself the uncommon luxury of a hansom, a cab driven by a man in livery moved up to the door, and at the same time the Colonel came out and stood beside me. He looked at me and at the sky, and gave a little shrug.

"Cab not here?"

"No," I told him, "I didn't order one. I mean to walk"; and, wishing him good-night, I was moving away, when he stopped me.

"Have a lift!" he suggested. "Put you down anywhere. Beastly night!" — and then, when perhaps I showed hesitation—"Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, Miss De la Rue that was—mutual friend. Waive ceremony." At which I laughed, and had got into the cab, and was spinning away with him, before we recollected that he did not know which way I was going. So we laughed again, and he suggested his club, saying that he wanted to call for letters; and ten minutes later I found myself in a very comfortable chair, with a big tumbler at my elbow and a cigarette in my mouth, while the Colonel sat beside me puffing away at a cigar, pulling his grey moustache, and staring absent-mindedly at the fire.

Before we had reached the club he had told me, in short jerky sentences, that he was only just home from the East, on half-pay, and he now began in the same abrupt way to say that he had enjoyed his evening.

"Pretty girls, by gad!" said the Colonel. "Wholesome faces!" When I suggested that life here would be slow work for him, he contradicted me flatly.

"But," I objected, "if you've been on the Indian frontier, you must have found life exciting?"

"Slow!" insisted the Colonel, stretching out his legs contentedly, and yawning at the memory. "Slow and uncomfortable. No society. No youngsters. Fond of children?"

"I FOUND MYSELF IN A VERY COMFORTABLE CHAIR."

On deliberation I thought that perhaps I was fond of some, and said so.

"Have you a family?" I asked innocently enough, and merely to keep things going until I could get him on to India; but the Colonel seemed rather startled.

"No! Hang it, no! Not a marrying man," he announced hurriedly; and seemed so disturbed, that I would have apologized if I had known what to apologize for.

"Has our friend any family?" was his next question; and as soon as I found that "our friend" was not our late hostess, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, I told him that she had; though whether there were four or five children, and what was the proportion of boys to girls, I couldn't for the life of me say.

On this admission, the Colonel, though still cordial, looked at me with unconcealed disappointment.

"You will be calling, of course," I suggested; "and you'll see them all for yourself"; after which he brightened up again, and said that of course, since Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was not such a very old friend of mine, I wasn't likely to know all about her family.

"She'll keep you occupied in other ways when you're there," he supposed; and nodded his head with grave respect, which I felt was quite undeserved, when I said, carefully, that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe talked to me a good deal about our proposed work.

"Always was a wonderful girl!" he told me. "Wouldn't find scope for all her energies in any

house. Takes a hand in everything that's doing, I expect."

"A finger in every pie," would have more nearly expressed some people's estimate of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's energy; but, of course, I didn't say that. I merely assured the Colonel that she was a prominent figure in a great many different organizations—which, after all, meant the same thing, but sounded more imposing.

I dislike long words, but I find myself constantly obliged to use them when speaking of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"Remarkable personality," the Colonel assured me; and I agreed this time so heartily that he grew still more cordial, and insisted upon my having a second whiskey and soda, which I sipped slowly, wondering at the same time why it didn't choke me, it having been offered, and accepted, under such disgustingly false pretences.

"I dare say," I suggested presently, "that you could give me a great deal of interesting material"; but he doubted that very much, and said so.

"Proud, I'm sure," he told me. "Nothing to tell, though."

"Nothing?"

"No literary interest," he declared. "Nothing, how d'ye call it? nothing psychological. By-the-by, I don't know what form your work's taking."

No more did I, and I groaned, but didn't feel quite free to make any admission that must involve Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"If you could give us your experiences," I told him desperately, "I'm sure the form might be adapted."

But the Colonel was still modestly incredulous.

"There's three or four good hands been all over that ground lately, I'm told," he added, "though I've not read 'em all yet. Nothing left for an outsider like me to say."

"Though, of course, she—and you" (an afterthought) "might put things better."

I thought of the "three or four good hands" who had lately taken the East as their subject, and I'm thankful to say that I believe I blushed, though I knew how little I counted for in the Colonel's sanguine prediction.

"A man's adventures are always his own," I pointed out.

"Never had any — worth mentioning," the Colonel insisted calmly.

"No fighting?"

"Rough and tumble work, and not at all pretty; wouldn't interest a woman at all," the Colonel decided.

"There's a bare line just above your right ear,"

I suggested. "That looks surgical. You didn't get it in your bed, I suppose?"

But the Colonel, though he allowed himself to smile a little grimly, would not be coaxed.

"A five minutes' scrimmage in Burmah," he explained. "A fool of a dacoit. She was always known by me to be a remarkable girl, and I 'm not surprised to hear what I do."

This last remark, I felt upon consideration, could not possibly apply to the dacoit, and I resigned myself to answer, as unreservedly as I felt possible, the Colonel's further respectful enquiries concerning Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, her vocations and avocations in Society; contenting myself with imaginative but silent efforts to draw parallels between them and dacoity, which last I should have found much the more interesting topic.

"A dear, silly man," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe said with charming frankness to Smythe and myself, when I mentioned the Colonel.

"Wooden, you know—wooden, but well-intentioned. Let me see! Yes, how long have we been married, Charles? *Fourteen* years! Good gracious! Well, then, he must have been in India and all those places fifteen years, and I suppose he has come home like a wrinkled piece of mahogany?"

"He 's a very good-looking man," I assured her;

"just the sort of man I should fall head-over-ears in love with, if I were a girl, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe."

"He was very stupid and very shabby when I saw him last," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe reflectively. "He had scarcely a word to say for himself. I don't believe he understood me either, when I talked to him."

"I can quite believe that," I told her, and promised, when I left, to see that the Colonel paid his respects.

XXIX.

The Colonel pays his Respects

THREE days after my first meeting with the Colonel, I saw him again on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's doorstep.

I was still in pursuit of her Idea, which I have mentioned before, and which had hitherto eluded me.

I have stated that Twellerby captured for our use, the notes which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had sent to be approved by a candid friend. But, at the first reading of them, I utterly failed to grasp their intention, and had to confess as much.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was not quite pleased by this admission, until she remembered (or was reminded) that genius can only be judged by its peers. She then admitted that perhaps these same notes were merely suggestive—perhaps scarcely even that, to a very moderate intellect, and she invited me to a second consideration of them.

It was upon this second reading that, as I explained to the Colonel, I was now intent.

I told him that much, in order that he might

see how utterly unimportant was my mission, and how easily I could defer my call until the following day—or year. But I had for the moment forgotten his deferential attitude toward anything glorified by the touch of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

He opposed my attempts at a retreat, with much the same vigour that I imagine he will have shown in facing diametrically opposite tactics on the part of an enemy.

I pleaded the insignificance of my errand. He raised his eyebrows in surprised disapproval.

I qualified the plea by protesting that a comparative stranger could not be needed at a meeting between old and long-separated acquaintances. He reminded me that I kept a lady waiting.

He made a right-about turn with the remark that he was an idle man, to whom one day was as good as, probably better than, another. I, at the same instant, gave the patient and imperturbable Twellerby a message for his mistress, to the effect that I would call again soon.

Having done this, we both began an attempt at flight, and then compromised by agreeing to call on Mrs. De la Rue Smythe together. So we bowed one another in, and the plum-coloured legs of Twellerby acted as our guiding stars, toward the presence of our divinity.

I am sure that the Colonel always dresses carefully. He will have done so, through self-respect and military instinct, even in the old days when, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe says, he was shabby.

On this particular afternoon I fancied that I saw signs of even more than ordinary care.

There was a fresh carnation in his buttonhole. His gloves (the Colonel wears seven and a quarter I should fancy) were new, and the thick grey hair, which had seemed close cut three nights before, had somehow since been trimmed closer still.

I wanted not to notice him, but I could not help seeing this, and that he carried himself as if on parade.

Also, while I vainly tried to concentrate my attention on Twellerby's calves, I heard the Colonel gently clear his throat, twice, between the foot of the stair and the door of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's boudoir.

It is a very strange thing how fortunate some people always are in their attitudes. They cannot help falling into picturesque positions at all times, even when unsuspicious of admiring eyes, and indeed unconscious of all, save the absorbing idea.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was deaf to the voice of Twellerby, and far above all social and earthly considerations and calls.

She was seated at her desk, which was pulled out from the wall so as to allow a large shaded standard lamp to be placed before her. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe finds inspiration in lamp-light, and alas! since quite lately she has, apparently, preferred her lamp-light softly shaded—say with pink.

Her eyes were raised, evidently pursuing the Idea, toward the light. Her attitude, one may suppose, was therefore symbolical as well as effective. We had the privilege of enjoying her profile for some seconds, while the further hand supported her chin, and the right held the pen which is to shake the world.

The Colonel stood spell-bound, and I made a mental note to the effect that, when next Mrs. De la Rue Smythe condescended, as she has sometimes done, to accept suggestions for tableaux, I would make her try that attitude, minus the desk, and plus "something Greek," as the Spirit of Poetry. Then the charm was broken, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe started, still gracefully, from her dream.

I had sufficient consideration to find something in the room which required concentrated attention, while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe and the Colonel exchanged greetings. In justice to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and to avoid the slightest chance of misunderstanding, I wish to state that I am sure

she had not the slightest need of any consideration from me at that particular moment, and that both her feelings (or, let us rather say, her sentiments) and her expression of them, were altogether worthy of the British Matron.

When I began to hear what was being said, I found that the Colonel was meekly expressing his regret, at having intruded upon an afternoon which had been intended for higher things, and at a moment when, he said, it was easy to see that Inspiration had come.

"Couldn't run away," he admitted. "Felt fifteen years wiped out. Saw it all again."

I couldn't help wondering, while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe murmured something appropriate, what it was, exactly, that he saw, and whether the Spirit of Poetry attitude was fifteen years old. Then I decided that it was no business of mine, and I rose to go.

"The Colonel," I told Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "was so ashamed of interrupting your work that I had to lure him in. He is your prisoner now, and I'm sure you won't let him go yet."

"No indeed," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, smiling graciously upon him, and the chains were visibly riveted.

"Treachery!" he protested feebly.

"Oh, Colonel! was it needed?" asked Mrs. De

la Rue Smythe with her archest manner; and the poor man could only stammer his apologies.

"Out of place in a boudoir!" he protested, looking all the while an ideal squire of dames. "Understood I shouldn't interrupt work."

"I'm out of tune for it," I declared.

"Again?" murmured Mrs. De la Rue Smythe plaintively.

"Again," I said, without any compunction. "It often happens, does it not?"

"This time, at least, I am not left without occupation," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, beaming on the Colonel, after a shrug which spoke eloquently to him of the difficulties in collaborating with me; and the Colonel, as he bade me good-bye, showed quite plainly that he feared Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was sadly handicapped in her great work—which I left her to explain in detail if she could.

XXX.

On Oysters and Good Manners

"THOSE oysters," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe pathetically, "crossed my mind in the night, and I could not sleep afterwards for at least an hour!"

I could not help trying to call up a picture of oysters crossing Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's mind; in the night, too! The subject seemed to be worthy of Blake.

I wondered how he would have drawn the organ (?) referred to; and I imagined it a bare and rather flat country, with a cold haze over it, and queer winding paths, with here and there an unexpected pitfall for the unwary explorer. I found it a difficult land to explore, even by day. But at night! I pitied those oysters. While I meditated, the Colonel, who had called with me, expressed his sympathy, but asked for an explanation.

"My husband," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "and, by-the-by, he has promised to come home early to meet you, and wants you to dine with us

next week — well, he adores oysters, which always remind me of some men, because they 're so close, don't you know."

"And because of their pearls?" I suggested.

"The pearls are much rarer than the oysters," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe decided; "and please don't interrupt any more, because it makes my head ache, and I forget what I was saying."

The Colonel who, I am sure, had seen the possible compliment on oysters and pearls, Smythe and his spouse, but, not having my impertinence, had not dreamt of introducing it so thinly clad, contented himself with looking his appreciation, and acting as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's remembrancer.

"Your husband likes oysters," he suggested.

"Yes, and he will have old friends, men, in to join him when he gets a barrel; and he is always in a fidget the night before because once the oysters were bad."

"Another point of resemblance," I decided. "Oysters remind you of men, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. I always think they are like manners."

Mrs. Smythe did not look particularly interested, but the Colonel, who, alas! still hopes for creditably intellectual conversation from us, and who in any case is a courteous listener, gave me his attention.

"There are good and bad oysters," I pointed out. "Good oysters, some say, are becoming very scarce. They are not easily got, and the liking for them is rather an acquired taste, like that, say, for caviare. Some people don't care for oysters a little bit, and, perhaps, since they're not to be got without trouble, it's best not to cultivate a taste for them?"

I thought this rather smart for me, and looked to the Colonel for applause, but he shook his head with a little sigh.

"I find manners have changed," he said, "even in fifteen years. Oysters haven't. I think them very good still."

"Which is more than you can say for the manners," I suggested.

"There's a different flavour," the Colonel admitted.

"You're having oysters, in that case, offered to you with the vinegar and pepper added to suit other people's taste," I suggested. "But you can keep your own for private consumption."

"I'm like Mr. De la Rue Smythe," said the Colonel, smiling a trifle sadly; "I'm fond of oysters, but I wish my friends to have the advantage of them. What if they find them bad?"

I was wondering whether I could venture to tell the Colonel that one person at least appreciated

his oysters very highly, and thought them of so delicate a flavour that he wished he had a like supply, when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who was looking at us with a bewildered expression, broke in.

"I never knew you were so fond of oysters—either of you," she explained. "I never heard even my husband say so much about them. You must come to-night, Colonel. But why did you stop talking about manners?"

I was about to suggest that we had been interrupted; but I looked at the Colonel, and changed my mind.

"We will begin again," I told her. "What was that you were going to say, Colonel?"—and the Colonel, thus called upon, cleared his throat, in that hesitating way which he still sometimes shows before Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, and began to explain his position. He is not nearly so shy, and he has almost dropped that way of firing a sharp volley of short words at one's head, and then waiting all alert, as if for the word to charge. But he still has a trick, which I like to suppose soldierly, of saying what he thinks, neither more nor less, when asked to do so. And yet one finds him pleasant to listen to—though, of course, as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe has pointed out to me, he is quite out of date.

"When I was a young man," said the Colonel simply, "I was poor, and, of course, I let people know it."

Truly the Colonel must always have been out of date. I suppose Mrs. De la Rue Smythe knew of his poverty as quickly as she knew of the respect which he still has for her.

"Of course," the Colonel continued, "I had to live a quiet life."

Heavens! a quiet life because he was poor. Why, if there is one thing more than another which sends a young man, helter-skelter, up back stairs, into great men's houses, it must be poverty. The Colonel must have been antediluvian at birth.

"So I used to read a good deal," he went on, "and perhaps what I thought were the manners of my equals, of whom I saw very little outside barracks, were just the manners of my literary friends?"

He looked at us for a reply, but I was bent on another matter.

"Your library, Colonel," I said, with an accusing forefinger pointed at him, "let me have a shot at it."

"It was a very small one to hit at that time," he retorted. "It's grown since, of course."

"Don Quixote"—I began.

"I find people do nothing but laugh at him—

if they know him at all nowadays," said the Colonel sorrowfully. "He was at least an honest gentleman."

I was about to name a dozen other books which I was sure could be found upon his shelves, when Twellerby, returning, presented a card upon a huge salver to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"The lady says that she is here by appointment, madam."

The Colonel rose, and I followed his example, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe begged us to be seated.

"It is only," she explained, "a young person who has been recommended to me as governess. Talking of manners—I hope hers are good!"

"You will be anxious to judge for yourself," suggested the Colonel; and again we moved, and again Mrs. De la Rue Smythe insisted upon our staying.

"You were discussing manners," she reminded us, with that playful air for which she is so well known. "Surely, Colonel, manners involve deference to a lady's wishes?"

At this the Colonel suggested that he feared he kept two ladies waiting, and that example was better than precept.

"I only hope this young woman may prove worthy of your consideration," Mrs. De la Rue

Smythe sighed, with the air of one whose experience did not allow her to be sanguine. "I must say that I find them most inconsiderate and unsympathetic. But I try to remember that it may be mere stupidity and want of education."

"In whom?" I asked innocently.

"I am speaking of persons of the governess class, I believe," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe a trifle sharply. "I do not know to whom my remarks would apply besides." And I apologized with due humility, while the Colonel, I thought, fidgeted a little.

"I, too, am sorry that we have been interrupted," I said, not quite sure what disturbed him, and wishing to please everyone. "I often feel that a poverty-stricken bachelor, with no position to give him a standing in society, may have manners which leave much to be desired."

"With a good manner," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe encouragingly, "one may go very far."

"The trouble is," I admitted, "that, so far as I can see, with no manners one may go much further."

"And fare worse," the Colonel hastened to add, with an air of simple belief in this as a self-evident truth, which made one feel, more than ever, that he is behind the times.

We then insisted upon taking our leave, and

before we had closed the boudoir door behind us, I saw that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's face had assumed a dignified inquisitorial air which, greeting the new-comer as she entered, would at once make her feel herself in the presence of a superior mind, not to be trifled with.

We met the girl upon the stair, and, as we stood aside to let her pass, the Colonel looked somewhat anxiously into her face.

Strange to say, it was refined, with a good chin, and a firm mouth, that softened pleasantly when she just acknowledged, in passing, what she seemed to consider as our courtesy.

"Nice child that!" the Colonel announced, when we had gone some little way in silence. "A good girl, you may bet your life on it!"

The Colonel seems to find good, at sight, in one shape or another, in everyone; and I ventured to suggest as much, while I heartily agreed with him in this particular case. He was already lost in his own thoughts, however, and frowned down the street in silence, until we came to the point where our ways divided.

There he stopped, and said that, as a man who had knocked about a bit, and who, knowing he had few brains, had always tried to keep his eyes open and to learn from his neighbours, he would like to give me a bit of advice.

"Charming thing to be talented," he said, frowning at me abstractedly.

"I expect so," I allowed.

"A snare!" he insisted with some fierceness.

"I don't know," I said feebly.

"Pardon me," said the Colonel authoritatively, "I see it. Here are you, full of goodness to start with."

"No, no," I protested.

"Pardon me, yes! But you also have great talents."

His air of certainty was most enthralling. Who was I to contradict him? My protest was still more feeble, and he pursued the subject, almost uninterrupted.

"Here is your temptation!" he declared. "To look at all things too critically; too entirely from the intellectual point of view!"

I protest I had never thought of this. And yet—if one's talents happened to be a little above the ordinary—though, of course, one would not take the credit; still——

"It is possible," I allowed with all humility.

"And what may be the result?" asked the Colonel. "Mind you, I say *may* be! Why, your sympathies, broad as I am sure they are, may possibly—and temporarily, merely temporarily—become narrowed. You may, to outsiders who

cannot gauge your feelings and your temptations, seem even wanting in fellow-feeling towards your own sex. And yet, through it all, you may be in reality a most charming and high-minded woman!"

With this astounding assertion, to which, I confess, I found myself unable to agree, the Colonel stopped and apologized for his prosiness.

"We were criticising other folks' taste in oysters," he remembered; "and now I am forcing mine down your throat. Dine with me to-night at the club, and you shall have better fare."

So I did, and, greatly to my satisfaction, led the Colonel into further expressions of opinion on men, manners, and other matters of all kinds. But he talked to me then as man to man, and has never again paid me the compliment of suggesting that I might belong to the more attractive sex—high-minded or otherwise.

XXXI.

The Body Snatchers

IT was the men of Athens—was it not?—whom Saint Paul accused of a love for new things?

One cannot help wondering whether, even in those days, such a taste can have been peculiar to Athens. If so, it has certainly spread more widely since—and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe suffers like the rest.

So far as that goes, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe simply follows the general principle of keeping pace with the times. She caught influenza when it was prevalent among the Upper Ten Thousand, and at the same time carried out the injunction to "suffer and be strong"—for I never saw her look better than when she went off, on convalescence, to complete her cure at a lively Hydropathic Establishment.

When she returned, she had a good deal to say about a new friend, the Honourable Georgina MacGalloway, a woman of immense intellect, and blood as blue as her spectacles. The Honourable

Georgina had, at the Hydro, given an address upon her pet subject, a new thing to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, which she has described as "thrilling"; and it seems that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe begged the Honourable Georgina to accept the offer of her drawing-room, for the repetition of the address, when they both returned to town.

I called rather late one afternoon, still in pursuit of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's Idea, and paid no particular attention to the somewhat hesitating way in which Twellerby allowed that his mistress was at home.

As Mrs. De la Rue Smythe herself has assured me, there are times when one realizes this world and all in it to be shadows, and Twellerby's substantial form did not, for the moment, receive more than a shadow's share of attention from me.

I reached the drawing-room just in time to hear the concluding words of a lady, whom I afterwards knew to be the Honourable Georgina.

"What you have seen, and what I have spoken of," she told us, "is, as many of you are aware, comparatively modern. There are remains which these hands have touched, that must be fully two thousand years older. But what are hundreds or thousands of years, more than a breath in the life of a world?"

Then she sat down, amid tumultuous applause from an audience which was entirely feminine, save for Smythe and myself; and, there being no criticism volunteered, a unanimous vote of thanks was passed in a dozen words, and tea followed.

"I am unfortunate again," I said, perhaps reproachfully, to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe as I helped to distribute the tea-cups. "For the future——"

"What is the Future, compared with the Past?" demanded Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with an enthusiastic glance at the Honourable Georgina.

I really didn't know; and having said as much, was surveyed, through the blue glasses, by the Honourable Georgina, with an air which said so distinctly how much she wondered at my being there, that I beat a hasty retreat; and, all the ladies being provided with tea, I secured a cup for myself, and took a place by Smythe on the hearthrug.

Smythe greeted me in a very friendly way, and indeed seemed quite glad to have me by him—which was a refreshing change after the glance I had just received from the Honourable Georgina. He mentioned the probability of rain—of course—and then, touching upon Foreign Affairs,—of which I am always profoundly ignorant, having no source of information but the newspapers,—in an evil

hour he asked me if there was any evening news.

"I noticed," I said, "an account of some Body-Snatching. I don't think I read anything else."

"Body-snatching? You don't say so!" Smythe asked, holding his cup suspended half-way to his mouth. "Whose body? Where was it taken from?"

He spoke rather loudly in his surprise, and a lady near me, who had caught the conversation, said she supposed it was those horrid medical students again.

"It was a Royal Mausoleum," I told them; and I spoke distinctly, being anxious to add to the afternoon's entertainment.

"Not Frogmore!" said Smythe anxiously; and though I told him that I couldn't remember the name, but was sure it didn't sound like Frogmore, I heard two ladies on the far side of the room assuring another, who seemed slightly deaf, that Frogmore Mausoleum had been broken into, and emptied of its contents.

"Those awful medical students!" said the lady who had accused them before; and there was evidently a general feeling of sympathy with her.

"Well," I said, "I believe they call themselves students, but some say they're thieves—of the better class, you know."

"Of the *better* class!" said the Honourable Georgina, glaring across at me. "These fine subdivisions of criminals are fatal to morality."

"Oh, I think there 's a difference, you know," I protested feebly.

"Come, come," said Smythe impatiently; "an Englishman's family vault is his own, don't you know, just as much as his house is. You don't mean to say you defend that sort of thing?"

At the same time I heard Mrs. De la Rue Smythe explaining, rather anxiously, in a whisper to the Honourable Georgina, who never took her spectacles (and, I suppose, her eyes) off me, that I was of good family, but peculiar.

To this the Honourable Georgina replied, "Very!" with emphasis, and continued to scrutinize me with marked disfavour. "And yet," she told Mrs. De la Rue Smythe severely, "though things like this happen, and are defended by some, who, we will hope, are not wilfully criminal, but only blinded by gross materialism,—yet Great Britain ranks herself among civilized nations."

"I don't think," I explained, "that I said this happened here. I understand that the robbery, or violation, if you like to call it so, was abroad, but the thieves brought their plunder here."

"Depend upon it then," said Smythe with a confident air, "they will get their deserts if they 're

caught. How is it known that they are students?"

"They make no secret about it," I assured him; feeling by this time a little bashful at the amount of attention I had attracted.

"They're collared, then?"

"I believe," I said nervously, "that they are being greatly hunted after, and they don't seem to be hiding very carefully. But I must be going, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. I'll call again when you're disengaged."

"Where did you say this took place?"

"Are you *sure* they weren't medical students?"

These two questions reached me together, as I was bowing my way towards the door, and together I answered them.

"The Royal Mausoleum, I understand," I explained, "was in or near one of the Egyptian Pyramids. The people concerned call themselves Egyptologists."

One of the young ladies near me giggled a little, and another said with a disappointed air, "An *ancient* tomb!"

"'What are hundreds or thousands of years more than a breath, in the life of a world?'" I quoted meekly, and then slipped away.

Downstairs in the smoking-room Smythe explained that he was very sorry for what I had said,

because the Honourable Georgina had been discoursing upon a mummy, which she, a profound Egyptologist, had brought with her for the benefit of the ardent seekers after truth upstairs. Of course, I apologized handsomely. But how was I to know?

XXXII.

On Marriage

"MARRIAGE," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, holding a cheque in one hand, and reaching out for an envelope with the other, "is a Divine Institution."

She found the envelope, and, laying it before her, let her pen hover over it while she meditated.

"How I am to call upon the future Lady Timothy, I don't know," she said plaintively.

"Why should you?" I asked, and, as Mrs. De la Rue Smythe at once told me, showed my want of tact by such a foolish question.

"For one thing," she reminded me, "some of Sir Timothy's property is close to Clearbrook, which, as you very well know, Charles has just bought. We must be neighbourly."

"By-the-by," I said, "I heard yesterday, at the club, that your husband thinks of standing at the next election down there."

This, of course, was quite irrelevant. My

thoughts do wander terribly, and I don't wonder that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe frowned.

"I suppose," she said with a judicial air, "that there is more groundless gossip and talk in your

"'THAT LITTLE HUSSY, DOROTHY SUMMERS.'"

club smoking-room, than anywhere else within the four-mile radius."

I consider it unwise to dispute what one cannot disprove, so I held my peace; while Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, after putting the cheque into an envelope and taking it out again in an undecided sort of way,

finally laid it before her, beside another, with two cards, and resumed her meditations.

"If that little hussy, Dorothy Summers, hadn't been so wickedly obstinate," she said, with some heat, "everything would have arranged itself beautifully."

"You don't approve of Golightly?" I asked her —for Golightly has plucked up courage and has been accepted by Dorothy, while Sir Timothy, some say out of pique, having straightway proposed to a very different person, both marriages are arranged for an early date.

"I thought," I continued, since Mrs. De la Rue Smythe contented herself by saying with a look what she thought of Golightly, "I thought you strongly approved of love-matches?"

"Love!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe contemptuously. "Where is the love of a man who robs a poor girl of such a position as Sir Timothy's wife would have? Sir Timothy has as many thousands, I suppose, as that selfish boy has hundreds!"

"Dorothy, at any rate, is unselfish then," I suggested; but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was sorry for my short-sightedness.

"Is it unselfish," she demanded, "to gratify your own wicked fancy, and to break your mother's heart?"

I agreed that this would be shameful conduct.

"But," I added hopefully, "I don't think things are so bad as all that. I saw Mrs. Summers drive past only this afternoon. She didn't look quite herself certainly, but unless there's Fatty Degeneration——"

"Spare me your charnel-house expressions!" Mrs. De la Rue Smythe entreated me coldly. "Many a mother hides a breaking heart with a smiling face, as she said to me only yesterday."

"She wasn't smiling, so perhaps her heart is not breaking," I hastened to assure Mrs. De la Rue Smythe; but that lady refused to be comforted.

"If the silly girl had only listened to reason," she lamented, "everything would have been arranged so nicely. I myself would have advised her in any difficulty, whenever we happened to be in the country at the same time. Indeed, I would have gone out of my way to help her."

"I am sure you would," I agreed. "I fancy Dorothy can scarcely guess what she has missed."

"You may be sure of that!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe; and being, I suppose, excited by the conversation, and full of righteous wrath at the thought of Dorothy's sins, she proceeded to show me convincing proof of my assertion.

From the desk before her she picked up a

cheque, and held it out to me. It called upon Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's bankers to pay Lady —— or order fifty guineas.

"Most generous!" I declared. "A few such bits of paper will start Dorothy very comfortably upon married life. But, since you must alter it, make out the next in Dorothy's maiden name, then she can cash it at once without anyone's interference."

"Pardon me!" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe. "I may be foolishly romantic" (I had never said so!), "but I cannot persuade myself to encourage open rebellion against a parent's wishes"; and with the air of virtue triumphing over weakness she showed me the other cheque.

It made five guineas payable to the order of Mrs. Golightly. I felt that I had no sentiment (which I could express) appropriate to the occasion; and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, after a triumphant glance at what was perhaps a discomfited face, proceeded to discourse.

"There is no need," she said emphatically, "to alter this," and she laid a finger upon the fifty guineas. "It is intended for Sir Timothy's wife—and his wife will get it. I do not see any use, therefore, in making it payable to any woman in her maiden name."

"Coals to Newcastle!" I suggested sorrowfully,

and merely because I felt that any silly remark might be less noticeable than the open-mouthed silence with which I had listened.

"Unto him who hath shall be given," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, with the air of one who felt herself to be a possibly humble, but not altogether unworthy instrument in the hands of Providence. "I *hope* Dorothy may not live to repent of her disobedience, but I cannot encourage her in it, and any such sum as this might not only be misunderstood, but might help to form extravagant habits, which would be quite above her position. We owe duties to Society which must be considered before our own inclinations."

This last sentiment evidently started a train of edifying thought, of which Mrs. De la Rue Smythe intended to give me the benefit. She leaned back in her chair, and commanded my attention with a steady gaze.

"Our social duties——" said she, and would certainly have told me something of which posterity would have been the better, when Smythe walked in. He asked me casually whether I had lately been attending any more Egyptological meetings, and then begged Mrs. De la Rue Smythe not to let him interrupt her.

"You were saying?" he asked, but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who very much dislikes being

interrupted, declared that he had completely driven all ideas out of her head.

"Our social duties," I prompted; but Mrs. De la Rue Smythe declined to continue.

"Talking of social duties," said Smythe, catching sight of the cheques, and nodding toward them, "I wish you to delay your letters until I have spoken to you again."

"I have nothing more to say about them," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, calmly ignoring me, "except that I have no head for petty business details, and want to ask you whether I should register, or cross them, or what?"

"We will talk about it before they go," said Smythe, with surprising obstinacy—for he is a peace-loving man—and I made a move, so that whatever was to be said could be said at once.

"If it is about that obstinate girl——" said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, paying no attention to my adieux—and at that moment the Colonel and Dorothy Summers came in together.

The Colonel was beaming, and announced that he had just had the pleasure of meeting Miss Dorothy on the doorstep, and of offering his hearty congratulations.

Of course Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, as hostess, had to be polite to the rebellious young woman of whom she had just been speaking so plainly—

and of course she rose readily to the occasion. Her greeting was everything that could be desired, while Smythe gloomily scrutinized the tips of his boots, and yet was able to tell me afterwards that I looked like a detected pickpocket.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe carelessly dropped her handkerchief over the papers on her desk, and left it there until Dorothy, after delivering a message from her mother, and chatting for a few moments, rose to go.

Then a most unfortunate thing happened.

When Mrs. De la Rue Smythe rose, her sleeve caught the handkerchief, and it went to the floor together with the two cheques.

There they might have stayed quite well, but Smythe, as he assured me afterwards, being a bit put out, lost his head, and started forward to pick them up.

Nor was he content with this.

He folded up one of the cheques hurriedly, and handed it to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

"You were sending a note to Miss Dorothy," he reminded her. "I daresay she won't mind taking it, and saving you the stamp." And Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, glad, I daresay, to avoid all chance of further discussion, slipped the folded cheque into an envelope, and handed it to Dorothy, with a smiling apology for troubling

her, and an injunction that she must not read it until she got home.

"If you two men are going," said Smythe, rather impolitely I thought, as he stood with his hand upon the drawing-room door after bowing Dorothy out, "why, I think I 'll come down the street with you." And just as we, not seeing any choice for that matter, said we *were* going and would be delighted, there came a strange sound from Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

It was something between a gasp and a groan that was turned into a cough; and, as a matter of fact, although I consider Mrs. De la Rue Smythe to be a thoroughly healthy woman, I confess that I twisted round with some alarm.

She had picked up a piece of paper—in fact, the other cheque—and was staring at it wide-eyed.

"Charles!" she said presently, but "Charles" merely answered that he would be back at or about such and such a time—he wasn't quite sure when—and we followed him down the stair, I, at any rate, in some wonder.

"The fact is," he explained to me afterwards, when we dined together at his invitation, "it was a cheque that my wife put into the envelope for little Dorothy."

"Yes; I had seen it," I told him.

"But she should not have been so hasty," said Smythe, raising his glass against the light and looking at it critically; "it was the wrong cheque!"

When, recovering from my astonishment, I expressed my sympathy and suggested, cautiously, that the cheque might be changed, Smythe was indignant.

"The name must be," he allowed, "but she mustn't suppose that we meant to give her less than that other woman. If my wife chooses to balance matters by sending the other to the future Lady Timothy—why, I shan't interfere. But it was a most unfortunate mistake of hers, wasn't it?"

"I think so if you do," I agreed; and Smythe laughed, and, ordering another bottle of wine, said that everybody did silly things sometimes, and that he always had a great liking for Miss Dorothy.

XXXIII.

An Art Patroness

I HAVE a theory, which I sometimes produce for the benefit and depression of artist-friends, that wealth and artistic taste are incompatible.

It is unfortunate that all my theories are not as easily proved. That is the worst of having a strong intuition, which leaps at right conclusions, without seeing the steps whereby to lead less agile friends.

When I meet people poking about in studios, and looking with interest at pictures, especially at pictures by men who are not yet recognized as having "arrived," I know them to be poverty-stricken—probably so poverty-stricken that they have no right to be there, since to be poor is to be despised by every self-respecting Briton—or pitied, which is for practical results the same thing. Therefore these dilettanti should be elsewhere, and trying by hook or by crook to rise in the world. While we are poor, it is inexpensive, and sounds generous, some think, to stand before pic-

tures and audibly wish that we were rich enough to buy them.

It is we penniless ones also, who assure the modest artist that his prices are absurdly low. I stand and hear these things frequently said in studios, and am grieved to see how little enjoyment is obtained therefrom by the author of the admired works—unless he be very young.

As my acquaintances prosper, they wander less often studio-wards. They might be expected to buy, which formerly they were not; and besides, the Prosperous become most beautifully conscientious, and feel their responsibilities and the necessity of setting a good example in Art, as in all else. So, when they buy, they avoid anything like rash speculation, but go where other rich men go, and buy where other rich men have bought before them, works by men whose reputation is made, and whose best days are very likely past.

"But what," you ask impatiently, "has this rigmarole to do with Mrs. De la Rue Smythe?"

I will tell you.

Last week I went to the studio of an old acquaintance, the Innocent, so called by his friends because of a guileless and utterly unsuspicious nature.

I go there often, because I've no money to spend, and the Innocent knows it, and so I can

drop in and praise anything I like, without incurring expense.

Long before I shall have become prosperous, and correspondingly cautious, and therefore sparing of my praise, the Innocent will be a celebrated man. So I shall be able to prolong my admiration of his works, and even to buy them if I choose, without losing my self-respect.

I was not surprised, therefore, to find myself there, but it was intensely interesting to see Mrs. De la Rue Smythe in possession, and full of compliments for the unsuspecting Innocent.

In accordance with my theory, since Mrs. De la Rue Smythe dealt lavish praise in an unrecognized artist's studio, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe should have been impecunious.

But, on consideration, I am bound to admit that my theories may apply only to the Average Woman, if such a creature exist—certainly not to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe.

If she had experienced any reverse of fortune, she bore it remarkably well. When I went in, she was favouring the Innocent with sentiments which were unexceptionable.

"To spend one's life in pursuit of the Beautiful," she was telling him, "is indeed to live."

The Innocent, who is sparing of words, said "'M yes?" and looked at me in rather a helpless

and appealing way; but I hung modestly in the background, after saluting them, and critically examined a sketch which I had seen a score of times already.

Finding himself left to his own resources, he added hurriedly, and with his eyes glued to the peculiarly ugly stove which pretends to warm the place, that to spend one's life in possession of the Beautiful was, he thought, more satisfactory.

The Innocent cannot have been referring to the stove. Perhaps he thought of his own pictures; if so, why did he express this admirable creed in so bashful a manner, and why did Mrs. De la Rue Smythe smile so calmly and contentedly?

"Genius," she said sweetly, "creates the Beautiful wherever it may be"; and at that point, perhaps because the conversation seemed intimate, or perhaps because Mrs. De la Rue Smythe on genius didn't interest me, I strolled out of ear-shot, and found a sketch-book, over which I day-dreamed for ten minutes or so.

When they drew near me again to look at another picture, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe was eloquent upon the delights of liberty and a Bohemian life.

"To be free," she told the Innocent, "from the conventionalities of a hollow society! To have liberty to come and go unnoticed, uncriticised!

To have no restraint—except of course that of one's own conscience, and one's artistic sense of the Beautiful and the True."

At this the Innocent laughed a little awkwardly, and said that debts to the frame-makers and bakers were restraint enough for any man; and then, apologizing for what he said was his silly joke, he listened sorrowfully to Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's protest that she must really be going.

"To a silly lunch," she said pathetically; "with people who care no more about Art, than my footman does": which I thought unkind to the reserved Twellerby, who might, for anything we knew, be a connoisseur.

So Mrs. De la Rue Smythe moved to go, with a nod to me and a pathetic entreaty that the Innocent would forgive her for having taken up so much of his valuable time.

"Then I may bring my husband next Friday," she asked, "if I can persuade him to come?"

"Certainly," the Innocent agreed, though without any great enthusiasm, "if you think he will care to look round."

"Oh, as for that!" and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe shrugged her shoulders. "I don't pretend that *he* is enthusiastic," she declared with an engaging air of frankness. "Mais que voulez-vous!" with which startling and original conun-

drum she left—before either of us could find the answer.

"Queer thing, Life!" said the Innocent, shaking his head with an air of superhuman sagacity, when he came back after having rushed to see Mrs. De la Rue Smythe into her carriage."

"You don't say so!" I protested.

"Oh, but it is though," insisted the Innocent. "Just a tangle, you know, for anything anyone can see. Now why does a woman like that, throw herself away on such a mass of artificiality as our so-called Society?"

Conundrums seemed the order of the day. Whereas Mrs. De la Rue Smythe had run off on propounding hers, the Innocent, being in a speculative, not to say inquisitive mood, waited for my answer, and I tried to provide him with what he wanted.

The correct answer to any riddle, we must allow, is the one which would be given by the Riddler himself.

"Duty?" I suggested, and the Innocent agreed that that was his opinion.

"A mistaken ideal," he suspected.

"What sort of a chap's her husband? A very different style, I suppose?"

"Oh, totally different," I assured him, and the Innocent, I saw, was at once convinced that

Smythe was certainly a Philistine, and probably a villain.

"But haven't you met him?" I asked.

"Oh, no," explained the Innocent abstractedly, making a jotting of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's profile, with a bit of charcoal as he spoke.

"I only met her out the other night, y' know, at the Wapinshaws', and he wasn't there. I thought it was going to be beastly dull at first, but I got introduced to her, saw her in a good pose y' know, and perhaps I stared. I don't know. Then they fetched me to be introduced, and we got on awfully well. Found old Greenbanks was a county neighbour of theirs."

Now I don't know the Earl of Greenbanks from Adam, and I wondered whether Mrs. De la Rue Smythe did. I knew, however, that he had lately visited the Innocent's studio once or twice, and that, he being a man with ideas of his own, it was even hoped by the Innocent's friends that he meant to buy some of that youth's pictures. What I did know about the noble Earl was, that he was supposed to have a good deal of influence, both in his county and with the Government.

"I don't think Mrs. De la Rue Smythe knows him," I told the Innocent. "Did she say she did?"

"Why, of course!" said the Innocent, carelessly.

"Think again!" I demanded; and the Innocent, openly wondering at my obstinacy over trifles, thought.

"She told me they were neighbours," he repeated; "and anyway, if she doesn't know him now, she will next Friday. I mean to finish that," nodding at his latest picture, "and Greenbanks is coming to have a look at it, and as they're neighbours I thought it was only decent to ask her too; and, of course, I had to ask her husband. She said something about my doing her portrait, if he would agree."

We then went out and had lunch together, according to previous arrangement; and, while lunching, I casually mentioned that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's portrait had already been done by Brush, R.A.; but this didn't trouble the Innocent in the least.

"I'll teach her husband not to go chucking all his money away on those old Johnnies, who've already got more than they know what to do with," he told me. "I don't believe Brush could do justice to that face"; which was blasphemy, but excusable, because the Innocent was excited and saw great possibilities.

A fortnight later I heard Mrs. De la Rue

Smythe, at somebody's At Home, telling her supper-escort what delightful neighbours they would have in the country.

"There's that dear old man, the Earl of Greenbanks," she explained. "I tell Charles that I've quite fallen in love with him. No, you mustn't look like that. I know he was gay when he was young, ever so long ago. But he reformed ever so many years since, and he has the most finished manner. I only wish one saw half as much chivalrous respect for woman in you younger men. He and Charles agree on a great many important things, and I'm hoping——" Here Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's voice dropped, and I heard no more.

I was occasionally at the Innocent's studio during the next few months, but as he never mentioned Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, neither did I.

She told me one day that she was going to give Smythe her portrait, as a birthday present, to hang in his study.

"Done by the Innocent?" I suggested; but when Mrs. De la Rue Smythe understood who the Innocent was, she said emphatically, "No."

"It is an enlarged photograph," she explained. "I am sure that Charles would be the last to wish that money should be wasted on another painting. I sat once already, you know, just to please him.

With money come responsibilities, you know. We are only stewards."

So Smythe got the photograph, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe got the Earl of Greenbanks' name upon her list of callers and of influential friends.

But, somehow, I believe Smythe got to suspect that the Innocent had been rather carelessly, not to say shabbily, treated. Mrs. De la Rue Smythe is astonishingly frank, at times, concerning her diplomacy. At any rate, he went to the Innocent and bought two pictures without trying to lower the prices. But the Innocent still cherishes the notion that Smythe is a bit of a Bluebeard, and that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe has a great deal to put up with, and was only prevented by a jealous husband, from being immortalized through his art.

XXXIV.

The Apotheosis of Mrs. De la Rue Smythe

"IN fact," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe haughtily, "you fail to grasp my ideas."

"I certainly do," I retorted, with perhaps unnecessary emphasis. "What is more," I went on, finding that Mrs. De la Rue Smythe continued to regard me with a certain air of *patient* condescension, "so far as I am competent to judge ideas which, as we agree, I fail to grasp, they have changed very considerably since you first did me the honour to suggest collaboration."

"I have endeavoured," remarked Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, "to keep an open mind, and to be ready to change my opinions when Reason suggested the necessity."

"I cannot imagine," I said bluntly, "where you have seen reason."

"In my daily life," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe sweetly, "I tread a great many paths where I have not the pleasure of seeing you. Only last night

I happened to be at the Yorkes', the Northumberland Yorkes'—you don't go there, do you?—and I had a conversation (which was really an intellectual feast), with the Earl of Greenbanks, whom, by-the-by, I fancy you don't know well."

"Not in the least," I admitted, and Mrs. De la Rue Smythe expressed her sympathy.

"You should try to meet him," she advised me. "He has the Grand Manner, and his acquaintance would be an education to any young man who needed—er—polish."

"You are extremely kind, Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, to offer me such a valuable introduction."

"I am very sorry," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe told me with some haste, and with just the least increase of colour, as she lay back in her chair and surveyed me from under drooping eyelids. "I am afraid that I cannot take the liberty of introducing anyone to Lord Greenbanks unless as my very intimate friend."

"That is a privilege to which I make no pretensions," I remarked, with a bow which I fancy must have suggested that I was wearing a backboard; and I began to sip my tea carefully, thinking it would be undignified to beat a hasty retreat, but resolved that it should be the last cup which I would take in Mrs. De la Rue Smythe's "study."

"Candour," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe regretfully, "is, I know only too well, my greatest fault. It is no doubt foolish of me, but I am so ready to make allowances for generous impulse in others, that I am apt to expect the same consideration."

"Am I to understand," I asked, ready to relent, "that you think you may have been too candid just now?"

"Dear me, no!" she replied, with a little movement of surprise. "What have I said now, which I could wish to alter? Indeed, I feel that I should be afraid to speak my mind upon anything, if that bound me not to look more deeply into it for fear of changing my opinion. I must say, Mr. Tregenna, that I think a scientific education seems to narrow some minds. It fosters intolerance, *I* think."

"Well," I said resignedly, "I don't pretend to know where society needs scourging. If you, on studying it more closely, think that it needs patting on the back, I am certainly incompetent to act as executioner alone."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe nodded her approval, and proceeded to explain her point of view more fully.

"A wider charity," she informed me, "must always follow a wider view"; and I began to feel

what a narrow-minded, bigoted ignoramus I must be.

"At one time, I know," Mrs. De la Rue Smythe continued sweetly, "we did talk of certain little—er—weaknesses, which we saw in those around us, or, will you pardon me if I say in those who were, socially speaking, above us? We did, I know, even carelessly consider the possibility of writing some light essays, or some such trifles, upon some such subject."

"I have never suggested," I told her with some warmth, "that these people are above you."

"Were," she corrected me with humility. "I am sure that I have always been the first to acknowledge it, and, whatever the De la Rues may have been, the wife, in this country, must be content to take that position which is her husband's for the time being."

"You lay an emphasis on 'Were,'" I pointed out. "If you wish me to infer that your husband's affairs have prospered to any remarkable extent, allow me to congratulate you before I go. I may not be seeing you again for some time. I am sorry to say that I have had no particular increase of wealth since we began our instructive conversations."

"Of mere money," said Mrs. De la Rue Smythe wearily, and with a shrug expressing passive endurance of that burden, "you have often heard me say I

am not covetous. We are placed beyond want, and that is all one has a right to ask. But, as you know, I am ardently loyal. I would defend the Throne with my life and my last penny—and any sign of honour coming direct from the Fountain of Honour, is, I confess I think, to be received with humble pride."

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe receiving anything with "humble pride" was a picture which I could not conjure up. I tried to do so, and failed, and probably my face showed my bewilderment, which I fancy she enjoyed—perhaps with "humble pride."

"It is rather early to speak," she continued, "but since you say I must not expect to see you again soon, I will take the responsibility. I confess I am not inclined to make a great mystery out of so comparatively small a thing as any mere worldly honour."

Here she paused again, lest, I suppose, too sudden a shock should prove fatal to me, and in the silence I heard the swift trot of horses in the street below, as a carriage rolled up to the door.

Mrs. De la Rue Smythe heard the sound too, and it had a curious effect upon her. She had been leaning back, watching apparently for the effect which her news should have upon me. Now she seemed to forget me altogether, and sat bolt upright, her eyes sparkling and turned toward the door, her

lips a little apart, her hands gripping the arms of her chair. The front door opened and closed quickly, with a bang that echoed through the house, and a moment later Smythe came in.

If he felt any particular excitement, he was well able to hide it. He asked for tea as usual, and stood upon the famous polar-bear skin chatting to me, and carefully avoiding his wife's glances. I fancied that he looked a little shame-faced, and that was all.

When I said good-bye, which I very soon did, he asked in his ordinary way concerning the progress of what, with mild sarcasm, he has always persisted in calling the Great Work.

"It is dead," I told him, holding out my hand, "and I think we 'll bury it."

If Smythe meant to raise any protest, he changed his mind after a glance at Mrs. De la Rue Smythe, who obviously agreed with me.

"Well, well!" he decided. "Of course you two know best. I 'm afraid though that you 've wasted a lot of time over it, Tregenna?"

"One is always learning," I said politely; and was moving away, when Smythe cleared his throat a little nervously, and begged me to wait a moment for a piece of news.

"No great matter," he explained, "but it will be in the papers to-morrow, and I know you 'd like

to be the first to congratulate Lady De la Rue Smythe."

"A baronetcy?" I asked.

"Yes; a baronetcy. Settled finally this afternoon. Lord Greenbanks told her last night that it was practically certain; but I suppose she didn't like to tell you until it was made public."

I turned to congratulate the future Lady Smythe, but scarcely know whether I made myself heard.

She had eyes for Smythe only, and if ever she loved him her face showed that she did so at that moment.

I moved once more, and Smythe insisted upon coming down the stair with me, and drew me away from the attendant Twellerby into his study.

"To toast the baronetcy won't do it any harm, will it?" he suggested, and then, as he filled two glasses, "What's this about giving up that scribbling of yours?"

"Nothing, except that it's given up," I said innocently.

"Oh!" and the future baronet drove his hands deep into his pockets, and took a turn down the room.

"You know," he told me presently, coming back, and with a nod at the ceiling, "she's had a great deal of worry over this business, which she was determined to bring about for my sake, bless her!

Now, you know if she has been a little irritable—hyperæsthetic you call it, don't you?—why I 'm sure you won't be so silly as to take offence."

"Why should I?" I agreed.

"She 's a wonderful woman, you know,'" he went on. "We couldn't manage the things she does."

"I 'm sure of it," I said heartily.

"She 'll make a name for herself yet, you know, if only her social duties will let her," he went on. "If you don't get too busy you 'll take this up again with her, when she wants to, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly!" I promised with the utmost readiness; "whenever she wants me."

"That 's right, my dear fellow!" said the tender-hearted Smythe, pleased to think that I was not hurt, and clapping me heartily upon the shoulder. "We all have our times of impatience, you know, and our little failings."

"We all have," I said reflectively; "but I suppose there 's hope for us so long as we know that. I 'm going home to consider my own."

* * * *

It was a chilly day, some little while later, a day upon which spring seemed to have wrapped winter's mantle about her.

I happened to be in the West End of London and

was hurrying along, chilled by the east wind, when I found myself checked by the crowd which watched a long line of carriages.

Being irredeemably ignorant of Society's ceremonials, but curious concerning them when they cross my path, I sought information from a benignant policeman, and was told, when he had recovered from some slight surprise at my ignorance, that this was the day for the first Drawing-room of the season.

I had hardly grasped the situation, when the slow onward movement of the file brought an old acquaintance into view.

It was Twellerby, long since, by-the-by, rejoicing in an almost equally splendid companion, and in the title of Upper Footman.

These Heavenly Twins (if the expression be not copyright) were hanging on at the back of a luxurious carriage and pair, and, yes, of course, in that carriage sat Lady De la Rue Smythe.

I saw that Twellerby saw me, and was ready to acknowledge the acquaintance, though doubtful how to do so with decorum in the existing circumstances. But Lady De la Rue Smythe had no eye for me, or for any other of the crowd about her. While we looked at her she looked steadily forward, seeing, I have no doubt, still greater social triumphs in the future.

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While the faces about me were chilled and parti-coloured by the nipping east wind, which indeed seemed to have reached some of the occupants of other carriages, she was, to all appearances, quite unaffected, and sat upright as any lance, patient, and sure of ultimate arrival at her goal. A little tremor of the ostrich plumes above her head, a shimmer of diamonds as they rose and fell at her breast, were the only signs of a healthy though quickened pulse, which evidently was enough to keep her comfortably warm without the help of any cloak.

Presently the carriages moved up a little further, and Lady De la Rue Smythe passed altogether beyond me.

With a smile at her disappearance, which I fancifully chose to consider ominous, I took my opportunity of diving across the road, and almost plunged against the Colonel, who was watching the vanishing point of the line.

"Yes," he said, in answer to my enquiries, "I had the pleasure of seeing her. In fact, knowing that Lady Smythe was attending to-day's Drawing-room, and being in my club, I determined just now to give myself the treat."

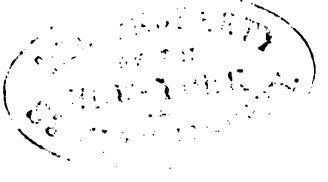
He then invited me to his club, and talked simply and openly of the lady as we went.

"A wonderful woman, sir," he protested, "and

I don't know how far a man may not rise, with her for a helpmate. At Court, or anywhere else, Lady De la Rue Smythe, you may be sure, will hold her own with anyone."

And I quite agreed with him.

FINIS.



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